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THE JOY OF LIFE





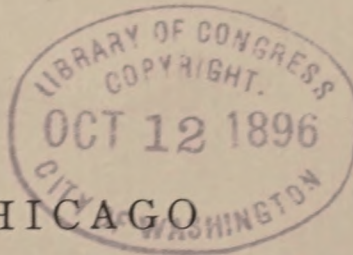


# THE JOY OF LIFE

BY

EMMA WOLF

AUTHOR OF "OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL," "A PRODIGAL  
IN LOVE," ETC.



CHICAGO

A. C. MCCLURG AND COMPANY

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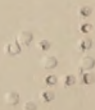
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## PART I.

*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold—it was very ugly. Then he created Illusion.*

ALGERIAN CYNIC.





# THE JOY OF LIFE.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE pioneers of Riverton remembered Percival Trent well. Indeed, he still remains a traditional figure of interest and importance in the annals of the town. His importance, however, only came to light after his death, — by which it may be inferred that Percival Trent had been either a genius or a miser. And, verily, the first surmise might be in part true, if to be a genius is to be possessed of a goodly share of uncommon, but very little of what the world calls common sense, — cold, hard, honest, two-eyed, brutal, workable common sense. Being thus equipped and afflicted, the second hypothesis proves itself pathetically absurd.

He was, in brief, a relic of Puritan transcendentalism — the word “soul” often found its way upon his fine lips or pen. But the dead languages not being extensively cultivated at that time in his section of the country, the word bore little meaning to his constituents.



He was by vocation editor of a weekly periodical designed to raise the spiritual side of his fellow-townsmen; but as his fellow-townsmen were busily absorbed in the raising of crops and the felling of trees, Trent's harvest was destined to become little more than a nominal figure of speech. In later years, however, they found that Trent's influence had left a nucleus of intellect in the village, which bore gratifying interest.

He had been bereft of his wife some six years before his entry into the prospering village. But it was only after he became better known that his veracity as to the cause of her death began to be questioned. Then, despite the frequency of his sad assertion that she had departed this life through bringing the boy Cyril into it, the grinning, unsympathetic opinion obtained, that, owing to his peculiar qualifications as a provider, hers had been, without doubt, a case of too much "considering of the lilies."

And the two shabby Trent boys were regarded as part of the Trent scheme. That Antony, the elder by a half-dozen years, should be the cock of the school was the only sequence to be expected of his origin. That he should be sullen and taciturn was held to be the natural result of untoward worldly circumstances. That little golden-haired Cy Trent should be delicate both physically and mentally, was also a subject for philosophic cogitation and acceptance. Little Cy laughed and cried readily and lightly. Antony, the elder, never cried, and laughed but seldom and not heartily. He had no playmates



because he never played. His companions were his books, — good company, in which he moved easily without going to the trouble of changing his mood or to the expense of changing his clothes. He belonged to the serious-eyed children of the world to whom life has never been a laughing-matter.

The brothers were much together. The women of Riverton were wont to watch, with a tug of pity at their motherly bosoms, the two shabby, uncared-for figures coming and going in their solitary walks, — solitary by preference on Antony's part, never solitary to Cyril so long as he was within hailing distance of his strong, silent elder brother. The women of Riverton often prophesied that some day, while thus engaged, the book-absorbed Antony would quietly step into the rushing river behind the woods, and carry, as unconsciously, his backward-looking follower with him.

It was during these early boyish walks that the purport of the following catechism might have been frequently heard : —

“Why do you read so much, Tony?”

“To learn.”

“Why do you want to learn so much?”

“To know.”

“Will ‘to know’ make you happy, Tony?”

“It will make me great.”

“And then will you be happy, Tony?”

And in the silence the rushing river echoed eagerly, “Happy! happy! happy!” — the only answer to Cy's perplexing problem.



But a few years developed singular foreign fruit. When Antony reached his fifteenth year he became his father's "devil," voluntarily quitting his books with a resolution as decided and peculiar as that which had held him to them. He had discovered for himself the limits and shape of the cage, and was fitting his song to it. The volubility of Percival Trent found good soil in his quiet son. And yet he was known to pause in the expounding of many a theory when the boy Antony interposed his cold, investigating gaze between his vision and its unproven consummation.

But little Cy felt no restraint in his presence. From habit, which had become instinct, he would quit his shouting playmates after school and betake himself to the little ill-smelling printing-room where his oracle worked. He generally found him, when not occupied, listening closely to the talk of the men in the office without, or sitting in tense silence, gazing into space. And it was —

"Tony, of what are you thinking?"

"Of the future."

"What are you going to be when you are a man, Tony?"

"Rich."

"But I mean what are you going to do?"

"Make money."

"But what are you going to *do* to make money?"

"Work."

"But lots of fellows work and don't get rich."

"I will."



"Why?"

"Because I will."

"And will you be happy when you are rich, Tony?"

"Yes."

"Father says money is a curse."

"Pooh!"

"Is n't it? Is n't money a curse, Tony?"

"Yes — to those who have none."

It was about this time, or shortly after, that Percival Trent took to his bed. For a while the little paper continued to make its cultured appearance every Friday evening; but the fingers of circumstance were slowly closing about its delicate throat, and finally fate, or the meeting of poor crops and a stroke of paralysis, strangled the little thing outright.

And Antony Trent was chained to his father's bedside — somewhere in the background of his nature lay a stern, compelling, diabolic sense of duty which permitted of no other course. Meanwhile time and opportunity were slipping past, and the boy knew it.

"How long is this going to last?" he demanded one morning of old Dr. Pennington, as the latter stepped on to the porch after a friendly visit to the bed-ridden philosopher.

"Do you mean the disease or the man?" he questioned, looking at the lad with a species of professional curiosity.

"Either," his companion responded briefly, resting his steely, unboyish eyes upon him.



“Oh! Um—m—m! Well, my boy, it’s hard to judge. It may last a month, it may last a year, it may last twenty. It depends altogether upon his stamina.”

“And meanwhile I must stay here and nurse him?” The tone was more menacing than questioning.

“Not necessarily, boy,” said the old doctor gruffly, moving on. When he reached the gate he called back with a short laugh, “Patience! Perhaps, with his usual consideration, he will make the visitation short.”

So Trent lingered. In this condition, which was neither life nor death but which might be called a middle state, Percival Trent gave voice to some startlingly inconsistent maxims. It may have been that still in, yet no longer of the world, he saw face to face, that out of the ashes of his life, Grim Truth arose at last and confronted him; it may have been that, lying in his small, cold room, where the shabby figures of his two sons came and went with insistent, purgatorial reminder, he came to understand that mundane “Success” is a very comfortable experience in a mundane existence; it may have been but the summing up of his defeats and failures which gave him the Grand Total, but he thus presented it to his son as the one tenable Scheme of Life:—

“My son, God is Power, and Mammon is his prophet. Youth dies, hopes die, loves die, religions die,—but Mammon’s rule is eternal.

“He alone is wise who fills for himself a pot of gold.



“The fuller the purse, the more godly the person : witness the eulogies on the dead ! And, verily, should not the purse-strings second the emotion of the heart ?

“Commerce enters into every undertaking—we get only that for which we pay. Everything is marketable, noticeably the great motives,—friendship, honors, love.

“Health, it is true, is unpurchasable ; but will you tell me, my son, that the poor man is exempt from bodily pain, and whether a wound is not better dressed with gold than without ?

“You may get credit on a good name, and that is well ; but you will get discount for cash—that is better.

“Life is a series of concessions, and the most obligatory ones are those which conscience or the higher intellect pays to practicality ; for might is right, and Sunday is only one day in seven.

“Sentiment is the open sesame to all the misery and folly to which flesh is heir. A cool heart makes a cool head, a cool head carries you to the summit.

“The best friend and only confidant of a successful man is himself. But for swift propulsion, a friend at court is a wise provision.

“My son, life is one of nature’s inevitable accidents. The strong man is he who lifts himself from the débris where he finds himself, and prevails.

“Genius is the nepotism of the gods. But for the ordinary human cripple, dogged resolution is a herculean crutch.”



And Percival Trent, being weary and full of disillusion, ceased from troubling. But before he turned his face to the wall, a softening ray fell upon it, and he said, "My son, after all, I have left you the credit of a good name. Look out for it, — and for the young-un."

Then he fared forth into No Man's Land.

## CHAPTER II.

IN the gray of the evening Adam Greathouse sat alone in his office, just before closing it for the day. Morton, the book-keeper, had long since gone, and he was disagreeably startled by the sudden appearance upon the threshold of a slender, youthful figure.

"Good-evening," said a quiet voice from the doorway. The small object Greathouse held in his hand fell face downward on the desk as he veered around.

"What the deuce" — he muttered angrily; and then dimly making out the face and form, "Come in," he added less brusquely.

The lad advanced into the half light, cap in hand. "I am Antony Trent," he said; "I —"

"Hello! You? Why, your father's just been buried."

"A half-hour ago — yes."

"And what brings you here?" Greathouse questioned suspiciously, wondering slightly, and slightly angered.

"I am looking for work. I believe your son Harry spoke kindly of me to you once."

"What the devil has that got to do with it?" growled Greathouse threateningly.



"I used his name merely as a reference."

"You did, did you? Quite sure you did n't know it's just a year ago to-day he died, and thought you'd have a good thing? Quite sure that isn't the secret of your hurry?" he sneered hotly.

"No," young Trent answered coolly, thoughtfully. "I did not know. Then, I suppose, my visit is well-timed. If I had known, though I could not have come more quickly, I might have come more confidently."

Greathouse looked at him doubtfully, as though not quite sure he heard aright. "And now you are more confident?" he asked with curiosity.

"Yes. The most successful beggars are those who stand around churches and churchyards. Charity is a matter of mood."

Greathouse felt like kicking him — the answer was abnormal, too old, too cold, too cut and dried, too inconsistent with the demand. But the honesty gave him pause. Besides, through his memory he heard a boyish voice crying excitedly, "There goes Antony Trent, dad! Come, speak to him — see if he'll answer you — he's a wonderful fellow!" And Greathouse, ever indulgent to that boyish voice, had cantered alongside to the youth leaning on the bridge in the sunlit morning.

"This is my father, Antony," Harry had said, a flush on his cheek as he leaned over his saddle; and Antony had looked from the gallant-faced boy to the burly horseman beside him, touched his battered cap, and said nothing.



“My son is an admirer of yours,” Greathouse had remarked pleasantly. “He predicts great things for you.”

“Thank you,” the ragged youth had answered coldly, gazing unabashed into the sharp gray eyes of Riverton’s most prominent and powerful resident. He had stammered and blushed no more on that day than he did now. The meeting had ended there, Antony having nothing to say, and repelling the potentate’s advances by his taciturnity. Tonight, however, Greathouse’s memory was busy only with the eager, boyish voice crying excitedly, “There goes Antony Trent, dad — he’s a wonderful fellow !”

The moment, as Antony had said, was not inauspicious, neither was it auspicious. Greathouse hated a prig, and he felt like kicking him, but he hated his gift of life more than his priggishness. During his moment of hesitancy, the boy’s personality told curiously. He was tall, overgrown, slightly but sinuously built, and carrying his head high. His wrists, visible beyond the frayed coat-sleeves, were slight and thin, as were his hands ; his face was of a dark olive hue, almost delicate of feature, — the eyes cold, iron-gray, deep-set beneath the high, narrow forehead ; the nose straight, fine, sharp ; the mouth neither large nor small, with thin, straight lips, the upper one already showing the faint, dark down which was the nearest approach Antony Trent ever made to beard of any description. His dark, thick hair had been clipped short before its propensity to wave could manifest itself. His teeth seemed to be



set. He gave the impression of strained concentration, as though, if hard pressed, he would suddenly snap like a spring.

"So you want work," said Greathouse roughly. "What kind of work?"

"Any kind."

"Well — I have nothing for you."

"Are you quite sure?" he urged, the intensity and pallor increasing with the words.

"Quite. Both the yards and offices are full."

Young Trent's lips pressed closer. "I relied on you," he breathed more than said.

"Why?" demanded Greathouse in irritable astonishment.

"I cannot say. It was a sort of faith, — it had no reason."

He was not speaking for effect, but he seemed to entertain Greathouse, who laughed harshly.

"Well," he returned shortly, "come in again. Perhaps next time there'll be a vacancy."

The lad looked directly at him from his hard, cold eyes. "You don't seem to understand the urgency," he said, and he turned to go.

Something, the quiet tone, the words, the narrow shoulders perhaps, angered the lumber magnate.

"Come back here," he snarled.

Antony turned. His face cut pale and sharp through the gathering dusk.

"Did you expect me to *make* a place for you?" asked Greathouse with brusque sarcasm.

"Perhaps. Yes. A rich employer can always



relieve one of his hands and make room for another — if necessary."

"Oh, if necessary! Where's the necessity here?"

"The urgency of the case." The lad was begging, only he was doing so in his own curt fashion.

"I am not an eleemosynary institution," replied Greathouse bluntly.

Antony smiled; it was not a reassuring smile, the eyes above the white teeth looking haggard and dark-ringed.

"Once," he said in the same low, emotionless tone, "you said that Harry Greathouse expected great things of me. Will you give me a chance?"

"What chance can you get from a lumber-yard?" asked Greathouse gruffly.

"The money chance."

"It would be nothing. You would be a superfluity."

"I would make myself a necessity."

"You are brave."

"Yes."

"I mean in stating your ambition."

"Oh, I am only honest."

He looked straight at him. Greathouse tilted his chair on to its hind legs and kicked at a cuspidore with his toe. The insistence of the look fretted him.

"How old are you?" he asked sharply.

"Seventeen."

"You seem to have learned a good deal."



"Yes ; I have been to school."

A gleam of light shot from under Greathouse's bushy brows. He, too, had had dealings with Percival Trent.

"Well," he frowned, shifting in his chair, "I don't see" — he fingered nervously the small object which had fallen from his hand upon Antony's entrance. The intruder's presence hung like a heavy, unaccountable burden upon him. He had never felt in just that way before on any similar occasion, and similar occasions had been numerous. He seemed for the nonce unable to rid himself of the incubus. His hand twitched at the small dark object, and turned it face upward. It was the flashing, happy face of a bright-eyed lad. Greathouse rose to his feet.

"Come in here to-morrow morning at nine," he said harshly.

A spot of color sprang into Antony's pale cheek. "Thank you," he said quietly. The next second, feeling he had had his dismissal, he turned, and, with a low good-night, disappeared.

Greathouse stood alone in the twilight, looking down.

"Morton can give him something to do," he decided, with a shrug of impatience. The lines deepened upon his forehead. He drew his hand across it and groaned. Then, with a hasty movement, he swept the miniature into a drawer, picked up his hat, and walked out into the darkening streets.



## CHAPTER III.

THE French are great philosophers — with them nothing “happens,” it only “arrives.”

According to which philologic summary, Antony Trent’s success arrived on the day Adam Greathouse, forced to the wall by disease and excesses, retired from the active management of his affairs, and made him, Trent, his private secretary and representative.

Greathouse’s associates heard of the change with veteran composure. “Greathouse has made another good investment,” they said, and awaited developments.

As for the other portion, the major portion of the little world which knew Antony Trent, the laboring, struggling, envious, ambitious, younger portion to which he rightly belonged,—the majority screwed their lips into shape and gave vent to a prolonged whistle of astonishment first, and bitterness, or jealousy, or what not afterward. Some of them said, “Luck!” a few said, “Will;” some one said, “Capability;” and the clergyman said “Honesty.” At which last, the philosophers laughed.

But the fact remained that, in the long run, he was successful.

Yes. But consider the dreary long run.



When Antony Trent began his novitiate in the office of the great lumber-yard, Morton, the old book-keeper, accepted his presence as a busy man does a fifth wheel, and Greathouse, after the first few days, hated him heartily, wholly, and unconditionally, — hated him, first and primarily, because he interfered with the course of selfish absorption which he had mapped out for himself; hated him because he was alive, and strong, and alert while another lay cold, impotent, and inconsequent under the merciless sod, — a wild passion finding its origin only in the coincidence of the lad's entrance into his life on a day when the remembrance of the other's exit had been bitterly keen; hated him with a strange jealousy from post to finish, yet retained him, held by a repellent though fascinating bond.

Morton grudgingly tolerated his assistance; Greathouse, barely civil, offered him the tip of his little finger, his head turned aside. With these frail props, Trent began to climb, a cold, indomitable persistence being the only strength which gave him breathing power in this antagonistic atmosphere. With a species of fanatic force he steeled his senses and held on. Greathouse felt his weight. It was this which irritated him. The magnetism of his person and being were irresistible. Time and again, while bending over a letter, he found himself thinking of the quiet young personality behind him, and between him and his paper would interpose the fine, purposeful head, the cool, critical eyes. Time and again, after the heat and turmoil of the day, in the



privacy of his home, he found himself lingering over certain curt sentences, unsolicited and unanswered for the most part, which rang over and over in his memory with telling force. Scarcely aware of the change, as time passed, Greathouse became accustomed to look for or listen to Antony Trent's opinions and valuations. Unconsciously he held out another finger. The magnet was doing good work.

Greathouse hated him for being alive, but would have missed him sharply had he lost him. Besides, he knew that, in an emergency, with a choice among twoscore employees, he would have trusted his all to Antony Trent as to a safety vault. "His damned honesty," as Greathouse styled it to himself with his usual profanity, seemed to protrude like a peg for others to hang their faith upon. And, strange to say, Greathouse hated him again for this very cold, indubitable honesty. If once he had shown a trace of weakness, Greathouse's arm would have been flung about him, and he would have defied the world for him. A hair, sometimes, thus separates the two extremes of passion. But Antony Trent never showed any weakness; and if Greathouse did him justice as his employer, that is, paid him according to his worth, it was because Greathouse himself was a just man, and, above all, because, curious as the situation may seem, he wished to stand clear in this young interloper's estimation.

But neither time, nor Antony, nor the town was standing still. Railroad and harbor commissioners had discovered the importance of Riverton's situation,



and were pushing toward it. Factories and mills and steam-vessels began to fill the water-front with trafficking smoke, which, spreading toward the homes, pushed residence property westward to the confines of the woods, making of Riverton a unique combination of town and village, or, as Antony Trent expressed it, "A City Front with a Country Back." Where the little wooden houses had formerly stood, rose dignified business blocks of substantial build. Representatives of eastern and foreign syndicates came and went, adding bustle and *éclat* to the once drowsy little village, now a teeming, miniature Manchester.

In the midst of all this newness and venture Greathouse's old lumber-yard stretched to the old wharf, an ineffaceable landmark. With a phase of superstition he had clung to the site as though all his prosperity depended upon it, although numerous incongruous buildings pressed about him. The post-office officials and several manufacturers had offered him generous prices for the property ; but Greathouse stuck on like a barnacle. Close beside him, somewhat elevated, rose his weather-beaten, quondam handsome residence, and neither a sense of the fitness nor the practicality of the suggestion could move him an inch in his dogged determination to keep it "right there." It was here his wife and son had died.

His fellow-townsmen accepted his whim with a smile. Greathouse could afford whims. In the day of Riverton's maturity he was known as the "Octopus." He was supposed to "own" the farmers for



miles around ; the long line of warehouses along the front, bursting with grain, belonged to Greathouse, and proved the foundation of the supposition ; back westward, through the vast wooded country, the loggers and logging camps were known to be "Great-house's" ; the snug little opera-house, the Boys' Academy on the hill, "the Greathouse building" with its commodious offices and stores, the trolley line extending from station-end to residence avenue, — all bore evidence of his power and wealth. And back of all this enterprise and aggrandizement — although no one but Adam Greathouse knew — worked the strong business acumen and far-sightedness of Antony Trent, son of Percival Trent, the despised visionary and rhetorician.

Taken on toleration, he had risen by inevitable steps from office-boy to assistant book-keeper, thence to amanuensis, to shipping-clerk, to contractor. There he seemed to stand. "Send Antony Trent to me : " such frequent, curt messages and as curt interviews were the only outward sign of his hold in Greathouse's estimation. But Antony Trent knew that from first to last his sagacity had been appreciated, if grudgingly ; knew that he would never join the band of starved geniuses so long as Adam Greathouse sat at the head and served from the great soup-pot.

That Trent, as he grew to manhood, was content to remain in this obscure position may seem incompatible with his ruling ambition. But the position was only obviously obscure. He felt his importance ; not only did he feel it with assurance, but he had



objective proof of it in a steadily mounting salary. Beyond which, he could read not only the signs of the times but also of his master, — knew that, in addition to his life-love of financiering, old age and disease were getting the better of him, and would finally, but inevitably, carry him from the scene of activity. Hence the necessity of an understudy; hence the understudy's patience. Trent awaited the event. When it occurred, or "arrived," Antony Trent was in his thirty-fourth year.



## CHAPTER IV.

AND among the general growth of things, Cyril Trent had come to manhood.

From a biographer's point of view his boyhood had been without incident or interest. He had simply "gone to school." The life and development, in adolescence, of a boy is intangible and unappreciable to all but the boy himself, and not always to him. Though his heart may have its turning-points, he seldom recognizes them. Memory, however, is a great romance builder; and in after years the women of Riverton recalled little signs and presciences pointing to the after man. That he had been a beautiful child, all were agreed. Through the ugliest externals of poverty the child and growing boy's beauty had shone out oddly, and proven a good friend.

Miss Tynan, the veteran school-mistress, told Barbara Gerrish once that she remembered how, one morning during her mentorship, the lad had come in late, and, upon her demanding an explanation, he had turned his sunny smile upon her and answered in unquestioning simplicity, —

"I had to stop and listen to the peace, Miss Tynan." Upon which, through some indefinable agency, the reprimand had remained unuttered.



The story of his one night's incarceration in the town-jail also became part of history — afterward. It had resulted from a common enough scene. Some mischievous school-boys had surrounded an inoffensive, or, rather, unoffending Chinese, and were plying him with ridicule and stones when young Cyril Trent, hatless, coatless, dashed in upon the biggest rowdy, and gave him so violent a drubbing and massaging that the authorities were called, and the golden-haired Quixote was borne to justice. He was released the next morning, with a warning against any further display of brutality.

"Sir," said the fifteen-year-old boy, looking steadily into Constable Hutchins' face, "among brutes I shall always be a brute." "Well, young man," returned Hutchins with a laugh, "who made you my deputy?" "The hour," replied Cyril, and went his way.

Probably the most characteristic anecdote was told by Widow Black, to many willing ears. "Land o' glory," she would say, raising her hands in protesting ardor, "when I see him coming barefoot inter that there back-yard with something under his arm, I just stood there and said, 'Cyril Trent,' I says, 'what've you been a-doing now? Where's your shoes?' And he just set down on the step and took that accordeen on his knee and begun playing like an angel — the kind of music that gives you a pain in your chest and chills and fever up your back, you know, — and when he finished he looked up at me and says he, 'Mrs. Black, don't you think it was a good summer trade?' And I says, 'Cyril Trent,' I says,



‘never mind what *I* think. What will your brother say about it, do you think?’ ‘Wait till he hears me play,’ he answers quiet like.” But history does not record in what manner Antony Trent paid the piper.

Unlike his brother Antony, he made no brilliant record at school. Mathematics was his stumbling block, — it required too much concentration of the faculties, and Cyril’s faculties were sad nomads. The command to “wake up” and “apply yourself” rang in his ears continually. He was called “dreamer,” “idler,” “good-for-nothing,” according to his instructor’s insight or patience. It was only at odd moments, when a poem was to be read or recited, an essay written, a battle to be summarized, a hero eulogized, a traitor anathematized, that he rose curiously to the occasion, and, despite his record, forced the observation that there might be “something in him after all.”

His brother Antony, meanwhile, supplied him with food, clothes, and shelter, — meager, and of the poorest sort, but Antony himself had no better. Antony bore his privations stoically; Cyril never felt he was bearing privations. He was singularly happy and heart-free, until came the day when his brother thought it time to ring the change. He had been delicate as a child, and allowed great latitude; but from his fourteenth year his health and strength took superb strides forward. At sixteen his shoulders far outstood Antony’s slender build, and though his fair skin was never ruddy, its marble firmness and whiteness bespoke unmistakable health.



The fact of his physical redemption being borne in upon Antony's perceptions, he decided to treat the situation summarily. His method was of the sledge-hammer variety, no circumlocution, strong, quick done. A memorable scene ensued — memorable to Cyril, as was every other fateful encounter he ever had with his brother.

It was a bitter night, and after their frugal meal in Widow Black's kitchen, the brothers had ascended to the small, cold room which was their common sleeping-apartment. Antony lit the lamp and lowered the blind in his usual active, assertive manner, while Cyril, pulling his chair up to the table, drew out his school-books. They had no fire, and they hunched themselves about the lamp.

Apparently they were not intimate, except in their undiscursiveness, which is often, unwittingly, the most subtle medium of intimacy. Across the long years of silence during which these two had lived so closely together, an indefinable, *familiar* atmosphere had developed, which double the same years of discourse could not have acquired. That sense of soul, recognition, the feeling of being "at home," free, unhampered, was theirs in all its closeness, distance, warmth, indifference.

The lamp stood between them on the uncovered pine table, which was strewn with books. The boy rested his elbows on the table, his head in his hands. His thoughts were — where? Cyril himself could not have answered. His was not an orderly mind. A point-blank question generally stunned him.



Antony looked across at him ; noted the brooding brow, the boyish beauty of the face, and a swift frown flitted across his dark countenance. He closed his own book promptly, keeping his forefinger between its battered pages.

“Cyril,” he said sharply.

The boy started up. “Oh,” he cried, with a laugh, “how you startled me, Tony ! What d’you want?”

“I want to know what you are going to do for yourself.”

“Do for myself?”

“Yes. You are sixteen years old. You are old enough and strong enough now to shift for yourself. When are you going to start in to earn a living?”

A strange, glowing flush overspread the warm whiteness of the lad’s face ; his lips trembled with unspoken words ; he looked half-affrightedly, half-shyly at his brother.

“I — I had not thought,” he faltered.

“What ! At your age ? Where is your sense of independence ? You are strong now. I can’t divide with you always.”

The glowing flush burned in painfully. “I know,” he answered in a low voice, after a pause.

“Well, what do you purpose doing?”

The boy’s tense fingers rasped the leaves of the book nervously. “I don’t know,” he answered with effort ; “you say, Antony.”

The appeal was characteristic. He had never outgrown his first leading-strings.



“Decide for yourself. I should think at sixteen — you — a boy in your position — would have some leaning — some ambition — some desire toward earning a livelihood.”

The painful flush had receded, an intense pallor succeeding it; something swayed in his sight; he flung his arms outward, his head sank upon the table, he burst into wild sobbing. It was Antony's first premonition of a stubborn enemy. His nostril quivered, his lips set firmly; he was intolerant of emotional weakness.

“Nonsense,” he said harshly. “Stop that.”

The sobbing subsided pitifully, but he did not raise his head; his shoulders were quivering convulsively.

“Answer me,” said Antony, sternly. “What are you crying about? Look up.”

The boy finally raised his head, essayed to speak, but succeeded dismally.

“Well? Brace up. Come, be a man. Of what have you been thinking, Cy, — or is your future a blank?”

“You see,” came the boy's low, passionate response, his wet lashes resting upon his cheek, “I *have* thought about it. I know all you have done for me, Tony, but — but —”

“Go on. Let the past alone. That is my affair. It doesn't concern you.”

“It *does* concern me, — it will always concern me,” he retorted hotly. “But I can't help it. I wish it were different. I wish I were different. But I am what I am.”



"Of what had you thought — practically?" observed Antony, curtly.

"I — no, no — I can't speak about it."

"Why not?"

"Because — I — you — I am afraid of your sneer, Antony."

"Indeed!" sneered Antony. He might have added to his contemptuous exclamation, but meeting the other's pleading, rebellious eyes, he said more gently, though with some impatience: "What folly this is! Have you anything to say, or not? Is there anything at all for which you think yourself particularly fit? If so, out with it."

"I have thought," stammered Cyril, his blue-gray eyes flashing for a moment into the other's, "I have thought — I might be able to write — some day."

The poor little secret was out, trembling and shrinking in the face of the world: only the bearer knows the agony of such a birth. Cyril looked hungrily up to see how his child was received.

Antony's face set darkly. "Write?" he echoed vaguely. "What do you mean by that? Write what?"

"Books — poetry."

A cold, disagreeable thought thrust itself into Antony's consciousness, and seemed to perch and settle down upon his shoulders like a bird of ill omen.

"Er — have you any basis for such a pre — hope?" he asked coldly.

"I have tried — things have come to me — I write them."



"Anything you might show?"

"Nothing much. A — a poem or two — verses, I mean — not poetry, of course." He hesitated, with all a novice's susceptibility to ridicule.

"Let me see."

Cyril fingered the book under his hand feverishly. At length he drew forth a scrap of paper.

"Here," he said with a show of bravery, handing it over, "here is something."

Antony took the paper from him with some curiosity, and read:

"Hush! Move not! Listen!  
From sky, from sea, from sod,  
Swingeth, singeth, swayeth,  
God! God! God!"

A sickening hush held the boy. He had given, of course, his masterpiece, and he awaited the oracle's verdict in agony. Antony was slow to answer; in truth, he laid the paper down without answering. He forbore to smile; his face was altogether expressionless.

"Oh," Cyril burst forth with white lips, "it is nothing, I know. Don't say anything — please, Antony. I know. Give it to me. There, there, there!" He tore it into tiny shreds, flinging the scraps upon the floor.

Antony looked on in quiet surprise. "How foolish you are," he said. "I would advise you to go more slowly. It pays better, you will find. I always keep a reserve fund, — of everything. I am no judge of your poetry, Cy. It sounds merely exclamatory to



me, though there may be some latent force in it. Of one thing, however, I can assure you : there is no — ”

“ I *told* you it was all wrong,” cried Cyril. “ I know it is simple, childish, crude ; but if you say there is no soul in it, you know nothing about it, and that is all there is to it.”

“ I was about to say,” resumed Antony, quietly, “ that there is no money in it. That, I think, was the point in question. Was n’t it?”

“ Was it?” repeated Cyril, blankly. “ I don’t know. Of what were we speaking?”

“ Of earning a living. You know, or at least you ought to know, that poetry and money do not go hand in hand.”

“ Not at first,” ventured the boy, bravely ; “ but afterward — ”

“ And meanwhile?” cut in Antony, sharply.

The boy drew in a long breath. “ I could not breathe in — in a store,” he muttered.

“ Beggars cannot be choosers,” suggested Antony, with gruff triteness.

“ Yes,” Cyril flashed back, “ they can — They need not breathe at all.”

“ Pshaw !” said Antony, contemptuously. He opened his book again and began to read. Silence fell between them, and was unbroken until the lamp began to splutter, when Antony arose and announced his intention of going to bed. The young boy made no comment ; he kept his eyes fastened upon his book, his mouth set in the same strained line of pain.



The lamp went out. Antony was either quiet or sleeping. The cold, white moonlight looked in beneath the blind and added to the chill of the room. Cyril sat hunched at the table, his head between his hands. A whole town of castles had been pillaged, royal booty taken, the fair towers left a heap of ruins. And the lord of it all sat in the midst, still and hopeless. The griefs of youth! — so much deeper than older griefs, knowing nothing of the great Peace-maker, Time. He had lived in his hope; the present had been but the necessary interval before the great note could be struck. He had lived in the future, — the present had been but an ecstasy looking to that end. Cold, hunger, privations? He had known none of them with that glory ablaze in the distance. But now it was all quenched, beaten out, quite extinguished by the one word of him who had ever been his master. He had not the strength to withstand hostility from that quarter. He had always counted upon Antony's co-operation; with Antony for an abetter he had felt able to move mountains. Imagination had even painted its tender scene of confessional: Antony's reluctance to listen, his skepticism, his little start of recognition, his little flush of pleasure, perhaps pride! his advice to go on, to continue resolutely, to live only for that future, to make good the gift of nature, and to win his spurs. And now — without him for a goad he was hopeless, helpless. Without his support, the weaker nature fell. He sat rigid, stranded, while the cold, sick hours passed.



Toward morning, Antony, waking, put out his hand, and finding the place vacant beside him, he sat up in bed. The moon had vanished, and the room was densely black.

"Cyril," he called quickly.

"Yes," came the faint response.

"What are you doing there? Why are n't you in bed?"

He received no answer.

"Come here," he said impatiently.

The boy did not move.

Antony leaned forward. "I want to speak to you, Cyril," he said, with slow precision. "Will you be kind enough to listen?"

"I am listening, Antony," was the stifled reply.

"Well, then, I have been thinking about you and your capabilities. Perhaps your instincts are right; we are not all turned out after the same mould, — you can't make a draught-horse out of a race-horse, or *vice-versa*. A commercial career might be impossible to you, — that is, a successful commercial career; it might be mere waste of time, a fiasco probably. My decision is taken upon that point. I believe you might make a success in a more scholarly field. Are you listening?"

"Yes, Antony."

"In something professional. For that, you would need education. There would be whole years during which you would not earn a cent. Well, a successful professional man reaps the interest of his non-productive years afterward, and —"



"Meanwhile?" interposed Cyril, hoarsely.

"Meanwhile," proceeded Antony, calmly, "I will help you. If you have anything sterling, worth cultivating, it will show itself; if you care to work for it I will help you — somewhat. I will see that your immediate material wants are satisfied, and — students have a way of helping themselves. You may regard this as a loan, if you wish. Some day you may be able to pay it back."

The words sounded chill, yet strong as iron. Cyril shivered, but clutched blindly at them.

"Thank you, Antony," he said, drawing in an icy breath. "But it is too much; I may not succeed, — and beggars cannot be choosers."

"As you will. The offer stands: take it or leave it, — it is at your disposal. Well?"

"Now?"

"Certainly. Don't gamble with time, Cyril. When you see a fact, take it. We can't afford to lose anything. Well?"

"Thank you, Tony," he replied, frightened into desperation. "But I can never pay it back."

"You may. Who knows? Well, it is decided now. You had better get into bed."

So, with a trifle more of stability, a trifle more of the iron of purpose, Cyril Trent continued to go to school. He never stopped now "to listen to the peace," or to fight the cause of the oppressed. Antony expected something — he dared not disappoint him. That thought was the god in the machine. Before long he had outstripped the limits of the village schooling,



and with Antony's slender assistance and a collection of his father's priceless old books, he removed to the metropolis, in order to prepare himself for the University. He worked at a hard strain. He came out brilliantly in the classics and philosophy. One (and later, others) of the students of more favored fortunes, noticing his talents and his shabby coat, begged for an exchange of assistance. On the instant the hot blood sprang into Cyril's cheek — take pay for giving of his surplus! But the next moment the stern, supercilious frown of his brother flashed before him, and, flushing now at his own weakness, he struck the bargain. "Nobody's going to *give* you anything," he had often heard Antony say. "Whatever you get is for value received or to be received." Upon this basis, Cyril managed to keep his balance, and his strong, hungry young body in order.

He hob-nobbed with one or two of the professors at the University, — or, rather, the professors hob-nobbed with him. There was something attractive and refreshing in the simplicity of this young man, — working his way, using his corporal powers, if nothing else offered, in order to sit under the tutelage of these acknowledged thinkers; they respected him for the sunny candor of his struggle, independently of his decidedly original bent of mind. That Cyril Trent would win his Ph. D. went without saying. What he would do with it was another question, — one which, in his senior year, Cyril himself seemed reluctant to answer.



"In the field of ethics are many mansions," he wrote once to Antony. "With an aptitude for all, it is difficult to select the one in which one would feel most at home, and therefore at his best."

Antony received this vague information with a slight distension of the nostrils and a not over-pleasant smile of the lips. Dilettanteism in whatever direction was distasteful to him. He aimed at solidity,—solidity of purpose and of act. He was not without imagination — no healthy man is. There is always some absorbing thing to be reached further on, whether it be a fortune, a fame, a horse, a toilet, a love, or a dinner, — little pocket batteries to keep off torpidity. And Antony Trent could dream,—but only while acting. He never juggled with the future. The philosophy of inactive waiting was unknown to him.

"You have to keep moving if you want to catch your train," he argued. He believed that you burst upon the scene, not the scene upon you. He loved life for the struggle's sake,—the struggle of cleverness with circumstance; the "I am!" of the man against the "we are!" of the many. To have one goal and to strive toward it; to feel one's strength and to use it athletically; to know no faltering and no wearying, and to achieve at last,—this was Antony Trent's religion, his life present, his life to come. The haven of his works was his heaven, and he was walking straight toward it. He could not sympathize with Cyril's vagaries.

Therefore, a day or two before commencement-



day, he was astounded by the receipt of the following communication :—

MY DEAR ANTONY, — I have taken the plunge, — that is, the preliminary one. I have not waited for your verbal approval, because I felt convinced of it in advance, — in fact, am acting almost entirely upon that assumption. You will, I think, link arms with me when you hear of the “sanity” of the step. I am about to enter the employ of the great booksellers, “Howard and Mavin,” in the capacity of correspondent, — a position created for me and offered by my classmate, young Bradbury Mavin. His father has become incapacitated; Howard, you know, died last year, and Mavin, senior, has elected to use his son as his business successor. The latter has acquired an unconquerable idea that with my assistance and judgment he can “get along,” and not otherwise.

Do not imagine, I pray, that I am about to sacrifice myself on the shrine of friendship. I have not gone through college entirely for the luxury of the thing. I have an aspiration (note the definite article), but I have come to Saint Simon’s conclusion, — that one must own his own skiff before he set sail for the stars; balloon travel has not yet been perfected, and experiments are expensive.

The salary, one hundred dollars per month, will advance in ratio to my business value. I shall endeavor to fill a big bill. Forgive my not unfolding whither this materialism tends. I am in deadly earnest about my future — my life-work — and any disapproval upon your part would only cause estrangement of feeling, which is unnecessary now, if ever. Our aims and interpretations of life take opposite directions. That is written. What you regard as an end is to me but a



means to an end. I may never reach it. But meanwhile we are travelling the same road, and let us love each other without further thought.

Send me your benediction to add to the great debt of

Your "young-un" as ever,

CYRIL TRENT.

Antony sent his benediction.

The years passed, and meanwhile the brothers were travelling the same road.



## CHAPTER V.

IN Riverton, the architects have always made a feature of porches. Even as far back as the sixties, when Adam Greathouse's "big house," as it was then designated, was built, the depth of the porch had been half that of the house, thus, probably, setting the fashion for subsequent dwellings. Had it not been for their porches, the history of many a Rivertonian might have proven different,—environment taking such a leading part in the play of life. It was here the children studied, sewing was done, tea was drunk, scandals were hatched, politics discussed, romances developed, tragedies concluded. They were all well protected with awnings or lattices against sun and wind, and some of the latest improvements showed artful nooks and vanishing corners where much could be done and said *sub rosa*.

Greathouse's was only wide and straight and long. The view was good, facing the river, a blue strip of which showed through the glossy branches of the great magnolia tree, another garden institution dating from primitive Riverton. Had the situation been other, the young girl seated there in the long-chair in the distressing August heat might have



found some comfort in being out of doors. But the sense of ease was totally spoiled by the neighboring tooting of steam, the whir and flap of wheels, the buzz of saws, the distant shouting of men, the creaking of heavy trucks, and all the noises attendant upon the compact center of a busy little manufacturing town.

The young girl's book had fallen unheeded to the floor, and her eyes had closed languorously. Her pretty face wore an air of petulance, as though its owner rebelled against the relentless tyranny of the excessive heat.

The click of the garden-gate and a brisk step up the walk caused her brown eyes to open a trifle wider, and turned her head interestedly in the direction of the sound. A tall, slight man approached, looking disconcertingly cool, though dressed in conventional dark clothes with glimpses of conventional white linen. He carried in his hand a small roll of papers, which probably added to his air of alertness. As he reached the steps leading to the veranda, he noticed the girl, who had risen to a sitting posture; and, mounting the few steps, he raised his hat, pausing upon the landing.

The girl arose and advanced a pace. "Did you wish to see my father?" she asked, wide awake now, and with some diffidence.

He turned directly to her. "Yes," he replied. "Miss Greathouse?" He stood in courteous questioning, his hat still in his hand.

She bowed slightly and tentatively.

"My name is Trent," he continued, "Antony



Trent. I wish to see your father at once, if you will let him know."

"Oh, you can't," she replied lightly, looking into his dark face with girlish frankness. "He does not wish to be disturbed this afternoon. His foot has been troubling him, and he has just fallen asleep."

"Oh," acquiesced Trent, thoughtfully. Then, with a smile through which his strong, even white teeth flashed for a second, "You are aware of my connection with your father?" There was no presumption; yet a faint hint of indulgence, as of manhood slightly bending to extreme youth, spoke in his voice.

"His secretary, are you not?"

"Yes. Pardon my insistence, but the papers I have brought require his instant examination and signature."

"But my father is asleep," she reiterated, with ruffled dignity and quaint surprise.

"The papers are important," he said, drawing out his watch with quick business formality and studying the hands, "and Mr. Greathouse must sign them within ten or twelve minutes in order to have them reach the post. Will you kindly arrange that I may speak to him?"

Miss Greathouse raised her eyebrows in resignation. "It seems to be a matter of life or death," she remarked with youthful flippancy, as she half turned away.

"No," he returned, with another brief smile, "only of several thousand dollars."



“Oh!” She appeared slightly confused. At the door she turned and looked back at him. “Won’t you sit down?” she asked.

Trent bowed but remained standing, his eyes following her girlish figure until she had disappeared.

Objectively, he had transferred his attention to the frontispiece of the novel which he had picked up from the floor. Subjectively, an old nursery tale was running amusedly through his thoughts:—

“And the great merchant said, ‘Little boy, what are you doing?’ And the boy said, ‘Picking up pins.’ And the merchant said, ‘Little boy, you are a good little boy.’ And he called him in and gave him a place in his house, and afterwards he married the merchant’s daughter, and when the merchant died he was very rich.” The association of ideas was sufficiently clear. They fitted to a nicety. In fact, he believed he had found the missing link necessary to the forging of his great chain. And although Trent smiled grimly at the literal application of the picking up of pins to his case, the parallel dénouement seemed to him a practicable enough working proposition.

He had returned only a few days previously from a business trip to Central America. He had heard that Helen Greathouse had dropped down unexpectedly upon her father during a seminary vacation, but he had given the knowledge scarcely a thought. The mere sight of her now was responsible for his sudden inspiration. It assumed the aspect of a crown to his ambition. She was still a school-girl,



would not graduate for another semester from her distant school. But she was Adam Greathouse's sole heiress, and rumor had it that the indifference with which he had treated her during her childhood and girlhood, sending her to an aunt, and washing his hands of all responsibility save the required one of paying her bills, had given place to a lively interest, and, upon her graduation, she was to take up her life again with him in the scene of her birth.

Trent's gray eyes were unsmiling and distant as usual when a servant appeared and showed him into Greathouse's presence.

"Good-afternoon," he said, making out the figure on the lounge in the dim light, and advancing toward it.

Greathouse mumbled a rejoinder.

"I have brought that contract with Delamere for you to sign," said Trent, standing beside the table which was drawn up before the couch.

"Why did n't you sign yourself?"

"Because you seemed to hesitate over all the terms. It gives Delamere the option of selling at his own discretion."

"And you think that would be advisable?"

"Yes. He knows the pulse of the market. I would trust him sooner than I would Belcher, who is willing to stand at 92. Delamere will not subscribe to any restriction, but he will do the best with it that can be done. I am convinced of that."

"Well, why did n't you sign then?" He gave a low groan, as he attempted to sit up.



"Can I help you?" Trent asked at once, though he made no movement.

Greathouse did not answer, and the next instant Antony had drawn nearer, placed his arm beneath the heavy shoulders, and raised the burly figure to a sitting position. Greathouse picked up a pen and scratched his name to the document without reading it. Trent took it up and replaced it in the envelope.

"Sit down a minute," said the old man, gruffly, as Antony picked up his hat.

"Thank you, no. I must drop this at once."

"I can send the boy."

"No. I have to make remittances to the loggers up Brierwood Gulch. Can I help you to lie down again?" He put down his hat, and Greathouse, yielding, allowed himself to be resettled in his former position.

"You have a good arm," he said brusquely. "Good staying-power. Er—" a flood of dark color overspread his purple visage. He was struggling between a sense of loneliness and an old-time intolerance, a sense of yearning and one of disfavor. "Come in again, Trent," he said laconically, at length. Trent thanked him and went off.

Greathouse, left to himself, lay silent, his hands clasped over his head. He was conscious of a peculiar feeling, one which of late had always accosted him whenever Antony Trent left his presence, but to which he had never before succumbed in the slightest degree.

The old sense of resentment with which he had



regarded him as a boy had suffered little change during the many years in which he had watched him develop to power and manhood. At least Greathouse would suffer no recognized change. "What is Antony Trent to me?" he would repeat angrily to himself, fiercely encouraging the old sore feeling. Yet there was a subtle difference. For Antony Trent manifest, present, he had nothing but a grudging respect and trust; for Antony Trent absent, a loyal admiration and a strange, lingering desire for positive ownership. A glimpse of him, however, was always sufficient to dispel the softer feeling upon the instant. Besides, Antony held himself somewhat aloof,—perhaps on the warning theory of "Follow a shadow, it still flies you." Greathouse, reproached by his associates for his unusual trust in Trent, would answer savagely, "He's straight as a string, sir, straight as a string," but would allow himself to go no further. The phrase became a feature of Trent's reputation.

To-day the old man felt himself melting wholly; the responsibility may have lain with the heat, or his feeling of illness, or the strong support of the sinewy arm; but Greathouse experienced a swelling in his throat which might have ended in something more womanish, had not the door been opened just then, to admit his daughter's dainty figure.

"Has your secretary-man gone?" she asked, opening a shutter and letting a stream of light into the room before she glided into an easy-chair.

"Secretary-man?" repeated Greathouse, irritably. "What do you mean?"



"Why, Antony Trent. Is n't he your secretary-man?" she dimpled teasingly.

"Is that wit, Nell? If it is, it is of a very low order." He was childishly and unaccountably nettled over her aimless banter.

"Why," she laughed, enjoying his naïve discomfiture, "don't you call the man who takes your lumber your lumber-man, and — and — well, why should n't you call the man who sits at your secretary your secretary-man?" Her girlish laugh rang out merrily. Unfortunately her merriment did not fall upon responsive ground.

"Indeed!" he echoed angrily. "Well, young lady, you may learn now — you can't learn sooner — that Antony Trent does something more than sit at a secretary. If you had a particle of discernment, you would have felt that at a glance. But you have none."

"Oh, yes, I have, dearie. I could see at a glance that he was a little Boston."

"What is that? What does that mean, Helen?"

"I mean he thinks he is the hub of the universe — does n't he? He has the manner of a man who thinks all the world waits upon his nod of approval."

"Because his will prevailed against yours? Perhaps if you were down in the office a half hour you would understand that few men do oppose his opinion. I have yet to find his first mistake."

"Oh, I see," she murmured with some surprise. "He is your Pope, papa; quite, quite infallible."

"Infallible? No!" roared Greathouse. "But as infallible as men in his capacity go."



"Is n't that a pretty good Pope? But let me tell you something, papa." Her youthful face grew suddenly thoughtful. "I don't believe in your Pope. He is not true."

Greathouse, thrown back by her unexpected seriousness, regarded her mutely. Her ripe, pretty mouth had set in a line of stubborn conviction. Greathouse felt her kinship with curious antagonism.

"Eh?" he demanded. "What do you mean, Nellie?"

"I mean that no man whose smile is a mere matter of teeth can be true. It is simply a machine smile, ready for any occasion; he parts his lips, and his teeth do the rest."

It was now Greathouse's turn to laugh, — a sarcastic, stinging laugh, to which Helen paid no heed.

"Don't laugh, papa," she pleaded, with some dignity. "He may be clever — that is it, he is too clever — too clever for you, Adam Greathouse." She had the courage of her conviction, and had been speaking in all sincerity until she heard her own voice, when, the words sounding good to her, she rounded her sentence grandiloquently.

Her father did not laugh. "By Jove, Helen!" he exclaimed, exasperated beyond endurance, "I'm a fool to listen to your callow school-girl twaddle. Who do you think you are? Damn it! who do you think you are?"

His daughter arose in unfeigned consternation. "Papa!" she murmured in an affrighted, protesting tone.



"I say, who do you think you are? Sit down! Do you know you are sitting in ignorant, childish judgment upon a man whom the whole business community respects to an extreme? Do you know that I would trust him with every cent I possess, and go to the other end of the world, and feel sure it would be honorably and wisely used? Do you know that — that he is uncorruptible, untemptable, that — that he is straight as a string, sir; straight as a string?" His voice broke hoarsely. He was frightened over his own vehemence; he felt weak and foolish in this first recognition of what Antony Trent was in reality to him.

"No," replied Helen, curiously, not knowing exactly what to say, but wishing to soothe her father's perturbation. "I did not know that. Then he must be a veritable Saint Antony after all."

"Saint Antony? Who was Saint Antony?" repeated Greathouse, in dazed weariness. "Oh, yes; something to do with women, had n't he? I saw a picture once — Don't tease any more, Nell. I don't know anything about Antony Trent and women; all that I know is, that he is straight as a string, Nell, — straight as a string."

A feeling of protecting pity impelled the girl to his side, and she patted his cheek lovingly.

"You're a naughty girl, Nellie," he said, stroking her hand in turn; "calling people all manner of unkind —"

"I know," she interrupted, in warm-hearted contrition. "But I only wanted to have some fun; you



were so terribly in earnest, papa. I'll sing you a song to make up. Shall I? It's all about him."

"Who?"

"Saint Antony. We used to sing it at school, — during intermission, of course. It's a wicked little song, daddy. No, perhaps I'd better not. Kiss me hard, dearidums; and I'll be good, and never do it again."

But once out of the room again, her momentary gravity vanished, and a wicked little smile danced in her eyes as she went off humming her wicked little seminary song: —

"Saint Antony, Saint Antony,  
For a mansion in the skies,  
Fled far the world's temptations,  
Fled the light of woman's eyes.  
But Antony, Saint Antony,  
Was it so wondrous wise?  
Dost regret no lost sensations,  
In your mansion in the skies?"

Meanwhile Trent had gone quickly down the street. He had put further thought of Helen Great-house into a pigeon-hole of memory, where it would be at hand at the propitious moment, and his mind was left free for the affairs of the hour.

He walked over to the post-office, dropped his mail, and, glancing at the clock, noted that the time was earlier than he had thought. He proceeded more slowly up the street. When he reached the office, he stopped for a moment to speak to the workmen who were erecting a new awning over



the old sign of "The Adam Greathouse Co." His voice rang out clear and distinct in the still air, and presently the office-boy emerged from the doorway, and walked hastily toward him.

"A 'rush' telegram inside for you, sir," he asserted, importantly. Trent turned away, stepping in after him.

He reached his desk in a stride, and picking up the envelope, tore it carefully open, and read: —

For God's sake, come at once.

CYRIL.

The wheels of affairs seemed to stand still.

He stood moveless for several seconds. The office-hands were busy, and paid no attention to his sudden rigidity. He had had no communication from Cyril for several weeks, and for months prior to that, had received only the briefest of missives. He had given no heed, however, to the lapse; during Cyril's five years of independence there had been several hiatuses in their intercourse; but Antony had not troubled. The demand came inopportunely. He had pressing business to despatch that afternoon, but the portentous nature of the telegram was not to be ignored. "The young-un may be ill," he thought, with a frown of vexation. He had no time to hesitate, however. He came quickly over to Morton's side, gave him some hurried instructions, explained that he had received a hasty summons, and, with a brief good-bye, was out of the door, just catching the omnibus as it passed on the road to the depot.



## CHAPTER VI.

SUDDENLY Trent laid down his pen, and in the flare of the gas-jets the brothers faced each other in haggard silence. Somewhere in the distance a bell announced the midnight, the deep tone mingling with the boom of a fog-horn.

The younger man leaned against the mantel-piece. He had stood so for the past three hours. For the past three hours no word had been exchanged; Antony Trent had paced the floor up and down, up and down, with quick, monotonous regularity, his gray face set and harsh, his eyes cold and repellent. Then he had seated himself and begun writing, his hand moving brusquely, almost cruelly, over the paper. Cyril Trent stood and watched him, his own face severely still in its intense ghastliness,—had watched the slender, sinewy figure treading the insensate floor for hours as though to beat from it some conclusive answer; watched him seat himself and begin the swift, spasmodic writing, as though delivering himself of straight hard blows; watched him seal, stamp, and address the envelope, as though affixing the last words to a judgment; and continued to watch him with the same vacant stare when the cold, hard eyes finally met his.



"Well," said Trent at length, with a harsh, mirthless laugh, "I've settled it."

The bloodless lips of the man facing him moved rigidly. "What have you done?" he uttered with discordant difficulty.

"You heard the terms. They are satisfactory — generous — to me. Remarkably magnanimous. I have subscribed." He leaned back in his chair, and laughed again in the same quick, ugly fashion.

"I — will — not have it," breathed Cyril, heavily.

"You — will — not have it!" sneered Antony loudly, regarding him with overwhelming contempt.

"You have no right," ground out Cyril, through set jaws.

"*I have no right!*" repeated Trent, curiously. His face had changed slowly, astoundingly. All the restrained passion of the man seemed to have met in a fierce, fiery knot ready to burst in a volley from its sheathing skin. "*I have no right!*" he reiterated with slow, choking utterance, leaning across the table in an attitude of menace. "You dare face me and say that? I have not the right! Who has, — you?"

"Yes."

"You? You had the right to dispose of your own life, but you shall not make a mess of mine. Do you think what I have done has been done for *you*? Bah! you fool, come to your senses! I have my own life to live, and you are not going to spoil it. Do you hear? I am paying high for it, — higher than you can ever understand; but whatever it is,



it is done for myself, and you must submit. Do you understand?"

"The burden is too heavy. I cannot endure it."

"You will have to endure it. I exact it. It is the only way. Do you hear? You will have to endure it, — as I must."

"Antony — for mercy's sake!"

"Hush. There is no other way, — no other way for me to save myself. Two need not go under. I *will* not. You will submit and — be silent."

"O God! Antony, you are cruel!"

"Cruel!"

Their eyes met as in a grip. The blood rushed over the painful beauty of the younger man's face, and, receding, left it still and vacant. His eyes looked straight and unseeing before him. His strong figure seemed to bend as under weight.

"No," he said, in a far-off, dreamy tone, "you are kind. You are very, very kind, Antony. I shall repay."

With a hasty movement, Antony sprang to his feet. "Don't be maudlin," he advised, with controlled violence. "You can never repay me. Don't come any of your fool visions upon me. You have made a mess of your life. You are incompetent; you cannot walk without assistance; you don't know what life means. It is hard, rough work; I have had to saw, and hammer, and shape, and fit, and clear my way; with muscle and brain sinew, with brawn and — hard cash — not with dreams and



ideals. Dreams and ideals! Rot! 'They've led you a pretty route!"

"Stop!" commanded Cyril, raising his hand, his face shining with alabaster radiance. "Antony Trent, I tell you, you are fooling yourself. It is all sham and delusion, your money scheme. The happiness it promises is like the horizon, never reached. Put me aside — you are incapable of judging me — perhaps at the judgment day you will experience some strange surprises; but while you have life and light, Antony, know this, — without ideals you are a blind conventional machine; without ideals you are lower than the dog who licks your hand; you are only dead, inconsequent waste matter."

To Antony, a ghost spoke, not his brother. He, the young-un, had vanished; in his stead stood the spirit of a dreamy-browed man before the light of experience had come to him. It was a strange, eerie sensation. A feeling of bewilderment overtook him. He was trying to beat aside elfish thoughts and shadows, to grasp the true from the false. He looked up. No ghost. A young man with shining eyes and ghastly face, — a dreamer too, — only this one dreamed after the event, not before. Never had Antony Trent felt the great Human Excuse as he did at that moment when gazing into the face of his father's child.

"You're a fool, young-un," he said, with a curious intonation of weariness. "You only beat the air, not the bush. You have your opinion, I have mine. No amount of discussion will ever make us agree.



Besides, discussion is not my business, — it has not taken the world very far from the starting-point, nor added anything to my advancement. I am not here to philosophize with you. This is not exactly a fit time. I was about to say — at least, all there is to say is that I expect you to be ready to start with me for Riverton the day after to-morrow on the eight-fifteen train. That is clear, is it not?"

"And after?"

"After, you will make the best or worst of the limits with which I shall supply you. I am not desirous of exercising any tyranny, but you have given me, and I have bought, the right of supervising your actions. You will start with me the day after to-morrow morning on the eight-fifteen train for Riverton. Have you any objections to make?"

"None, Antony."

"Then it is settled. As to what has passed here this night, I want absolute silence and submission. Never revert to it again in word, act, or look. It is my affair entirely — I have bought it — and I never speak of my affairs. This night and its work are over, forever — for you. Do you understand what my wishes are?"

"Yes."

"And do you promise to abide by them? Will you take an oath?"

"A promise is an oath."

They looked again for one deep second into each other's eyes.

"I am going out to post this letter," said Antony,



putting on his hat, his face showing gray and haggard under the black brim. "I will meet you here to-morrow morning." The door clicked behind him.

Cyril Trent stood motionless, gazing into futurity.



## PART II.

*Ah, Love! could you and I with Him conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
Would not we shatter it to bits — and then  
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!*

OMAR.







## CHAPTER I.

THE two men sat on the wide porch fronting the river. The hour was near twilight, the long, still hour of summer when day lingers in soft regret of its passing. Greathouse was smoking.

“While I have life, I shall smoke,” he had told the doctors doggedly, and he had kept his promise, — doggedly, in the face of the most painfully convincing proofs of its injury. Trent did not smoke. He had concluded long ago that it was easier not to begin a luxury than to desist from it afterward. He had also calculated that by total abstinence on that point he was the gainer of from twenty-five to forty dollars per month. He believed that he could invest twenty-five or forty dollars in something more substantial than a passing pleasure. His imagination was of the self-supporting sort; it had no need for incense or magnificat. His promised land was not a thing of perfumes and enchantments, houris and soft cushions, neither was it rife with tender grass, new-mown hay, nor the babble of primitive nature; he was neither devotee nor poet, sensist nor scientist. On this fine summer evening he was conscious of two things, — he had just dined for the first time with Adam Greathouse; he was conversing



with him, not as his business factotum, but as a man. If he scented anything delightful in the air, it was not the evening with its roses and jasmines, but the breath of his nearing dream.

He leaned back in a rattan easy-chair, facing his host, who, as usual, was stretched in his own invalid chair. The latter was enjoying a new, keen pleasure; they had reached the personal element, and Trent had found it expedient to relax somewhat.

“He rather startles me at times,” Greathouse was saying, through a cloud of fragrant blue smoke. “His ideas of supply and demand, property rights, and so on, are almost socialistic. He told me to-day — he drops in very often after his hours at the office — he told me to-day that he thought that, after a certain figure, a man’s possessions are only his in trust for the community. ‘You enormously rich men,’ he said, ‘are only stewards of vast estates, under moral obligation to divide your surplus among the less able, the weaker toilers after happiness. Surplus of any sort is only given to the strong to be judiciously expended on the weak.’ He is a great partisan of the poor, your brother Cyril. I answered him to-day that between you and him I am likely to stay where I am — what you put into my pocket, he persuades out.”

“They say he is eloquent,” smiled Antony, quietly. “He has spoken once or twice before the Sunday Morning Club, I hear.”

“So I have heard. Are you a member?”

“No. They profess to be conformists to no religion,



merely seekers after Truth, — and they look for it in the bottom of a Well. I have looked into the bottom of a Well, and seen my own face.”

“So you conclude — ”

“That Truth is a relative quality, — its features change with the spectator. My brother Cyril, I have been told, believes that Truth is Eternal, unchangeable, one of the fixed Laws, the same for prince as for pauper, — only the one is blinded by sitting too long in the sun, the other by sitting too long in the dark. In his lectures before the Sunday Morning Club, he hopes to hand it — Truth — around for examination to the sun-blinded.”

“He is a very picturesque figure. I understand he lives in Widbur’s summer cabin near the woods, and is keeping two poor lads with him, supporting them and educating them. He tells me Widbur left the cabin in a very comfortable condition, and has let it to him, furniture and all, at a very low figure. It is astonishing how he manages to do what he does on his salary.”

“He has made a study of simple living.”

“And has got it down to a scientific basis with remarkably healthy and comfortable results. I tell him he ought to publish a treatise on the subject, besides living it, but he waves the suggestion aside. Has he no life ambition?”

“That is his life ambition.”

The two men were silent for several minutes.

“He is very unworldly and — beloved,” remarked Greathouse, with unexpected gentleness.



"Yes. I understand the women in the town have put a halo around his head."

"He is strikingly good-looking," laughed Greathouse, — "the picture of your father as I remember him. Now you, I suppose, resemble your mother?"

"Yes. I am her son from crown to toe."

"What sort of a woman was she?" questioned Greathouse, with obvious interest and deferential curiosity.

"An ambitious woman, — the wife of my father."

The words cut sharply, almost tragically. Greathouse, with awakened sympathy, looked into the steely eyes of the son, who thus summarized his mother's history.

"You were young when she died, were you not?"

"I was six years old. I was never young. We were poor, and — I was my mother's confidant from infancy. Her confidences were my cradle-song."

Greathouse's big heart hammered uncomfortably. He hated the thought of this man's poverty-stricken youth. He had taken his cigar from his mouth and was examining it critically.

"Things have changed for the better, Antony," he said, the given name slipping out unconsciously in his emotion.

But Trent heard it. "Thanks to your assistance," he said, with a grave inclination of the head. "I am not a sentimentalist, Mr. Greathouse. I never indulge in speeches; but I think you have known that I appreciate what your assistance meant to me nineteen years ago."



"I didn't take you into my employ," said Greathouse, hoarsely. "The prompting was — well, we won't talk of that. But I have never regretted the step."

"Thank you," smiled Trent. "Nor have I."

"I was thinking," began Greathouse, with some warmth; but just then there was a sound of light, approaching footsteps, and in the gathering dusk two women came up the steps, the smaller running forward and precipitating herself into Greathouse's arms with a cry of "Papa!" The old man, visibly trembling, held his daughter to him.

"Did I frighten you?" she laughed, drawing back as she felt his silence and perturbation. "I told Cousin Ned not to telegraph. I wanted to surprise you, and it looks as though I had succeeded."

"Yes, Nellie, yes," he panted, clutching his side. "So you're back at last? All well again? See, here is Mr. Trent."

The girl looked across with a charming nod and smile of recognition to Trent, who had risen, and then turned toward her companion, who had hesitated on the topmost step. "Papa," she said, somewhat breathlessly, "this is Miss Gerrish."

Greathouse attempted to stand up. "Do not rise," said the girl thus presented, coming forward with a peculiar swiftness of motion. "I have come unexpectedly to my brother, Robert Gerrish of the Riverton 'Times,' and do not know where he lives. Could you direct me? It is such a lovely evening, and I should like to walk. Is it far?"



Greathouse looked up with quick interest into the dusky face, which seemed to belong by nature's fitness to the low clear voice. "Pardon my not rising, Miss Gerrish," he stammered. "I am somewhat of an invalid. I ought to know Gerrish's house, but not going about, I have lost track of the town. Mr. Trent, you can direct Miss Gerrish. Mr. Trent, Miss Gerrish — a particular friend of your brother."

They bowed courteously, Antony moving a step nearer.

"It is quite a walk," he said, addressing her. "We are in the business portion of the town here, and we — Gerrish lives up Residence Avenue in the extreme west. I have the good fortune to live with him, and should be pleased to walk there with you if you wish ; if not, I can give you explicit directions."

She listened attentively while he went on to explain ; they were of almost equal height, and looked straight into each other's eyes.

"It would be quite unnecessary to accompany me," she returned, in answer to his proffered escort, when he had finished. "I am quite sure I shall find it. Thank you. Miss Greathouse, we must not forget our promises. Good-night, Mr. Greathouse ;" and with an inclusive nod to all, she went swiftly down the steps, and passed, a tall figure, graceful with health and strength, out of the gate.

Greathouse, still holding Helen's arm, turned to Trent in surprise. "Never knew Gerrish had a sister," he remarked, as though struck by something confusing. "Looks like a thoroughbred. Wonder



what she'll do in this one-horse town with that — Where did you meet her, Nell?"

"On the train. I was feeling ill the first day, and Cousin Ned had wandered into the smoking-car, when she came up and spoke to me without ceremony of any sort. She was just like a rush of health, although she moved and spoke in the same low-voiced, cultured manner. She has lost her grandmother, with whom she has been living, and her brother telegraphed her to come on. I hope she will stay. I'd like to know her. Is her brother like her?"

"Gerrish ever speak of her, Trent?" asked Great-house, obviously ignoring the question.

"He did mention one Barbara last week, but not in this connection, I think." He met Helen Great-house's bright eyes fixed upon him with a rather mischievous regard. He smiled questioningly. "You look thoughtful, Miss Greathouse," he said. "I should think you would be too tired to think."

The girl laughed. "I never think," she returned. "I only 'guess.' Don't call any one, papa. I'll just run in and announce myself, and make myself at home, as though I hadn't been gone for a whole year. I'll be down again in a minute."

The evening was still and sweet with early summer; in the pale sky a few first stars glimmered faintly. As Barbara Gerrish turned due west after two northward blocks, the train of circumstances which had landed her in this strange western town stole into her thoughts and walked with her.



When the Gerrishes "came down," they accomplished the feat handsomely. There was no need, they said, to wear their financial ruin in their faces. And although Horatio Gerrish died of a broken heart shortly after his money disaster, the doctors pronounced it a case of liver trouble, and saved his family the notoriety of a tragedy.

The family consisted of his old mother, a son, and a daughter. His mother took the downfall and, later, the death, hard, — in secret. His son had cast off parental guidance with his adolescence, and from his Western retreat, where, with some push and dash, and regular remittances from home, he had managed to secure a niche in Riverton's rising journalism, he wired back the following consolation: "Hard lines. Hope there is enough for you two to get along with. Don't consider me. Am on the top wave this time."

Barbara received the message with a fine smile of derision, and a quick spasm of disappointment. She had some contempt for her brother, and not a little love of the romantic sort — a not uncommon feeling among girls for a man slightly known, whose life has recorded nothing but harum-scarum adventures or misadventures, but whose personality rings back a warm note of geniality, despite its undoubted selfishness.

There was enough "to get along with;" but the Gerrishes were not used to getting along. They had been used to riding along, or swimming along, or moving in whatever was the easiest and most approved



fashion which American wealth and knowledge could devise. Barbara had, however, provided herself with an excellent walking-stick. She was college-bred. The family cantankerousness had taken this form in her. Barbara would go to college, and to college forthwith she had gone. Horatio Gerrish's motto being for peace in the household at whatever cost, he had, early in his widowhood, discovered that the way of peace lay in submission to his decidedly strong-willed children. College leanings were not the ordinary failing of Barbara's set. In fact, her commentators called her vagary peculiar and affected. Of course it was peculiar; every one is peculiar, — at root; only, most people get drilled to want to look alike. Barbara had no such desire. She was not a sheep. That was her peculiarity. She respected her own sweet way and will of looking at things. She wanted to develop. In the little snatches and scratches of learning which she had picked up in her fashionable boarding-school, she had discovered that she possessed an ego, — a hungry, wistful ego with insatiate mouth agape for "more, more" of the great thought and impulse of the day. So when she said to her father in her swift, graceful way, "Dear, I am going to college," Horatio Gerrish felt that she was there already, although he said argumentatively, "Why? None of your girl friends go to college." "But I am not my girl friends," she said, turning up her face half archly, half earnestly; "I am I." And when her grandmother said, "Barbara, men don't want to marry blue-stockings," the girl responded



musingly, "I don't see what men have got to do with me, Grannie. I shall grow the way I want to grow, and if the men don't want me they may leave me." Her grandmother murmured something about "by-and-by," but the word bore only a remote meaning to Barbara, and she smiled her remonstrances aside.

She was twenty-three when she won her A. B. She was very proud of that A. B., — it was something like a crown which she wore inside her head. But on the day her father went under, she took it out and wore it openly. She said, "I am in search of pupils. This is my reference." But the words ran as though she said, "I am a princess ; you may come and learn of me if you wish."

She became quite a fad. "Poor Barbara !" Society said, "let us go and study Browning and Ruskin of her. We must help the brave girl along." So Barbara tasted the sweets of independence and patronage, and by-and-by she really got to like it, and sometimes, by-and-by, she grew heartily sick and tired of it. But she never told any one, because there was no one to tell.

She was nearing twenty-six when one day her gentle old grandmother smiled herself out of the world, and Barbara was left stranded. She had no intention of knuckling under ; but she wrote her brother a short letter, telling him of her loss, because he was the only person in the world upon whom she had a lien. With characteristic laziness her brother wired back : "Come along. I will look out for



you. I am keeping house. If you want funds, telegraph. If not, come at once."

She had not thought of this. In fact, she had just accepted an offer as instructor of physiology and hygiene in a girls' school; but, for all her independence, she was hungering for somebody to love, — not somebody to love her, mark, — and her imagination rushed to this stranger brother in the dim distance; and, with all the family spirit of venture guiding her, she withdrew her acceptance of the professorship, flung a parting look of tenderness to her three graves, and turned anticipatively toward the golden west which held promise of new life for her.

She felt a prophecy of happiness as she walked on. Buoyant health is mother to buoyant hope. When the blood flows bright and warm in the veins, optimism is rampant, and one feels himself king of his own fate.

The common which heralded the suburbs, and which she was to cross, was still two blocks beyond, when she suddenly became aware of a man's moving figure just ahead of her. She noticed his fine proportions and the supple play of his muscles as he swung on; but she was more attracted by the fact that he held his hat in his hand, and seemed to have a greeting acquaintance with all who passed. Her interest was piquantly increased when she saw one individual in overalls move aside as he came up, take off his hat, and bend reverently till he had passed.



"A clergyman, perhaps," thought Barbara, but rejected the idea in consideration of his apparel. He stopped once to speak to a young woman carrying a huge newspaper bundle, and Barbara was just behind him when, as they neared the entrance to the common, she heard him sing out to the policeman stationed there, "Seven o'clock, Tom; all well?" "All's well, sir," answered the belted guardian of the peace, touching his hat respectfully. The stranger's voice sounded mellow and musical in the evening air, and possessed the unmistakable accent of culture, which Barbara recognized, and which roused her curiosity the more to see the owner's face.

He entered the common, and was continuing on a few yards ahead of her, when he stopped abruptly, looking from side to side as though in search of something. Barbara, coming alongside, was passing on, but stood still a step beyond.

"A child is crying," she said, turning swiftly toward him.

"I am trying to locate the sound," he answered, meeting her eyes for a second and making a hesitating step in the opposite direction.

"I think it is over here," she suggested, nodding north, and moving toward the sound. He moved swiftly with her. Barbara's interest had deepened measurably after that fleeting glance into the stranger's face. The fitful, childish sobbing drew her, but the face of the man beside her added wings to the kindly impulse.



He strode past her as they came in sight of a forlorn little figure upon a bench, half hidden beneath a drooping willow.

"Well, little one," he was saying cheerily as she came up, "what's the trouble? Did you lose yourself?"

"Please, sir," sobbed the child, looking up into his bending face through a tangle of brown curls, "I've hurt my foot — and — I want to go home." She ended with a burst of loud weeping, and the stranger seated himself beside her, lifting her to his knee.

"Which foot?" he asked. The child, a girl of three, held up one little foot in its worn covering, and he unfastened the two buttons which held the shoe together.

"Let me," interposed Barbara quickly, depositing her hand-bag on the bench and kneeling in the grass before them. She could see, before drawing off the stocking, that the foot was sadly swollen. "Ah," she exclaimed, as she took the small exposed member in her hand, "a horrid splinter has got in. Just hold her firmly, please, and I will remove it." He assented silently. She opened her bag, drew out a fine, open knife, and after pulling off her glove approached the reddened foot. "Now, little girl," she said, her firm white hand commencing its work, "I will have the naughty thing out in j-u-s-t a minute. See, I wouldn't hurt you for the world — just — a — minute more, childie, and — there you are!" She held up the tiny bit of wood with a



radiant smile. "Nasty little thing," she apostrophized, while the child sniffed on. "There, I'll throw it far away. And now I'll make you all nice again." She proceeded, with professional care, to dress the wound, drawing the necessary diluted carbolic acid and vaselined linen from her small leathern receptacle.

"Are you a physician?" asked the man, with pleasant deference, as, still kneeling, she replaced the torn stocking.

A faint flush crept over her face under his gentle scrutiny. "Oh, no," she smiled. "I am only ready in case of an emergency. I have been travelling, and happen to have my little emergency case with me. There you are, little girl, — but I don't think you can put your shoe on. Come, let me wipe your eyes."

"I will carry her home," said the stranger, rising with the little form in his arms. "Do you know where you live, child? What is your name?"

"Tot," she responded with sudden shyness. "I'm Tot Lake. I live with papa down in Factory Lane by the Laundry."

"I know," he answered, with a nod. "Take your shoe from the lady, Tot, and put your little toes right in here." He drew his coat over the limb, buttoning it in securely. "That can't get lost, can it?" he said, with a boyish laugh, and he whispered a word in her ear.

The child piped a bashful "Thank you," and as Barbara threw her a kiss, the man raised his hat, and they turned in opposite directions.



“Some projected god,” she thought whimsically, “dressed in a gray sack-coat and white flannel shirt.” She laughed softly at the thought as she walked on, trying to overtake lost time. Through the gathering gloom his every feature, the marble purity of his face, the golden hair worn somewhat longer than custom demanded, the ideal brow and eyes, the sad, ascetic mouth, and broad, tender chin, gleamed like a will-o’-the-wisp before her.



## CHAPTER II.

SHE came up the walk, noting with quick observation the small villa-like house with its encircling porch, and the old-fashioned grounds with their profusion of fruit trees and garden blooms jumbled together in artless confusion. There was a disconcerting stillness about the place, but she went up the few steps and rang the bell. She heard it tinkle through the hall, and waited quietly for the answer. None came. She rang again, and, after a few minutes, the conviction seized her that the house was deserted. She had not considered this possibility. The film of night was falling, and she was alone in a strange place ; but a faint gleam of humor stole about the corners of her mouth as she looked about.

“I will take a survey of the premises,” she decided, and came down the steps, skirting the shrubbery at the side, and proceeded to the back of the house. Here all was quiet as in the front. The dog-kennels, chicken-coops, and out-houses held no occupants ; the porch was lifeless, the kitchen silent and barred.

She stood still, in perplexity. Suddenly from the direction of the stable, which was separated from the



rest of the premises by a high hedge partition, she heard voices in brisk converse ; at the same moment, the gate in the hedge swung open, and a large, heavily-built man came out, switching a riding-whip right and left. Her senses gave a leap of glad recognition.

“ Well, Petruchio,” she called.

The man stood, raising his hat in hesitation. Then he came toward her, the hat still raised interrogatively. She stood waiting, a tall, straight, full-rounded figure, holding her small leather travelling bag at her side. She was smiling, her somewhat large mouth showing the edge of strong white teeth, her dusky face holding a warm glow, her wood-brown eyes looking straight into his, as if to prompt his laggard senses. Presently his look of admiration passed into a swift one of recognition.

“ Barbara !” he cried, and with a quick movement he drew her to him. Her first impulse was to draw back ; but, with the second, she yielded her mouth to his caress. “ Why, you ’ve grown out of all expectation,” he said, holding her off at arm’s length. “ You ’re a high-stepper, Barb, and no mistake.”

She smiled now, but only faintly, looking up into his handsome, dissipated eyes. “ So have you, Robert,” she responded, “ although I don’t know that I had anything to base expectation on. Well, are you glad to see me or not, now that I am here ?”

“ Glad to see you !” he echoed heartily ; “ Glad to see you ! A man would have to be blind not to be



glad to see you, let alone your long-lost brother. Hand over that bag, lovely sister, and let us go in." He took the bag from her, and with his hand upon her shoulder, led her round by the shrubbery again and on into the house, opening the door with his latch-key.

"It's a man's house," he admonished, lighting the gas in the small hall, and going toward one of the open doors. "So don't be finicky, Barbara."

She moved past him into the room, and as he turned up the lamp, she stood and looked around her with approval. "I like it," she said decidedly, her eye taking in the great comfortable leather couch and easy-chairs, the well-filled book-cases, the heavy mahogany table strewn with papers and writing paraphernalia. "I like it," she repeated, appreciating the tone of the room at once. "What a splendid library you seem to have!"

"The books are Trent's — his father's collection, I believe. Sit down and take off your hat, and let's have a good look at you."

She obeyed with a little laugh, and sat looking up at him while she pushed her heavy dark hair back from her brow. With characteristic caressing manner, he came over, put one hand upon her shoulder, and, with the other under her chin, turned up her face. Something in the depths of her eyes brought a disconcerted laugh from his lips, and he moved from her.

"You seem to have good eyesight," he said, half-seating himself upon the table before her.



"I have," she returned quietly ; and then, wishing to dispel the faint approach of gravity, "who is Mr. Trent?" she asked with interest, leaning her head against the comfortable back of the chair. "And won't my coming disturb your bachelor arrangements?"

"Not a bit — why should it? Trent is half the time out of town ; and when he is here, he does not bother the house much. We took it only last year. Trent was threatened with brain fever, — fagged to death, — and the doctor had advised him to get out of the din of the town. I was in the same box — er — that is — I was running it too hard at the Club — and we fell upon this plan together, both as a sanitary and economic experiment. Mrs. Black, an old friend of Trent's, runs things for us — and will keep you in countenance — and with the help of Ching, the Chinese cook, we're in clover. But I say, girl, you must be famished." He started up with hospitable concern. "Sit there, and I'll see what I can dig up in the way of supper. I don't know how our housekeeping arrangements will strike you ; my only stipulation to the old lady was that she keep a full larder always on tap, and so —"

As he disappeared, rolling out a popular song in a great sweet baritone, the smiling, interested look in her eyes changed abruptly. Her face put on a disturbed, abstracted expression : she seemed to look into a troubled futurity. The unmistakable history of dissipation upon his coarsened yet attractive personality changed the whole aspect of her life



just ahead. And yet, at the sound of his returning footstep, her face lightened visibly.

"Here you are, Barbara," he called; and as he appeared in the doorway, bearing a huge pâté and loaf, a bottle tucked under either arm, a wholly bright smile illumined her countenance.

"Looks jolly to see you there," he ejaculated, standing still and beaming upon her. "No. Don't move — I'm waiting on you to-night. There you are. Now I'll get that cold duck I caught sight of, and the crockery and things." He seemed a big boy enjoying a lark. He came back presently, deposited his clattering burden, seized the corkscrew, and in a trice had their glasses filled.

He held his own up to the light. "See it snap, Barbara," he murmured, with an appreciative gulp and thirsty eyes. "It's the very essence of joy. Look at it! Well, girl, here's to you — live, love and be merry — and the devil take the consequences." He tossed the ruby flame down his throat, and sat down next her with a rollicking laugh.

Barbara felt her cheeks glow with confused excitement; despite her doubt of the moment before, his jolly good-fellowship was irresistible, and she fell happily to.

"It seems just like a picnic," she said delightedly. "I hope you won't be telling me presently that it is time for me to be up and away."

"No fear, sweetheart," he said decidedly, his heavy hand coming down on her slender one as she



reached for the butter. Barbara was unused to this sort of tenderness, and the loving epithet, which came as naturally from this big genial man as song from bird in summer, filled her with a new gladness.

"And you are quite sure your Mr. Trent won't object — nor the housekeeper?"

"Mrs. Black? She'll be only too glad to have a kindred spirit around to talk to. There's lots of room and no one to disturb you until dinner-time; and as for Trent, he never complains — close-mouthed as a fist. Nothing disturbs him. If he does n't like the company he is in, he has a faculty of withdrawing within himself so completely that he might as well be in another place."

"How very discourteous he must be!"

"Oh, no, he's not," laughed Gerrish, throwing back his head. "He only gradually grows more distant until he vanishes spiritually, in entirety. No one has better manners than Trent, but there's a sort of Puritan bloodlessness about him. He can tell a man he's a blackguard in the same low, even tone in which he might tell a woman he admires her costume — not that he is much given to the latter style of conversation. But he will approve of you, Barbara, beyond a question."

"Indeed! Why?" she asked, in disdainful surprise.

"Because — well, there's something about the cut of you that will suit Trent. Something like this;" he threw out his arm with a movement straight from the shoulder, indicative of perfect strength.



Barbara smiled with a show of understanding. She sipped her wine with leisurely pleasure. "Mr. Trent and I have already met," she said, after a pause. "I travelled here with a young girl, Miss Helen Greathouse, and accompanied her to her father's house for further directions in order to find you. With your usual care you forgot to send me your full address, but Mr. Trent was with Mr. Greathouse, and was as clear as a guide-book. But who is he?"

"The most desirable man — matrimonially speaking — in town." His dark eyes laughed wickedly into hers.

"Ah," returned Barbara, in the same spirit, "I must make a note of that. What does he do, did you say?" she added with American idiom.

"He is Adam Greathouse's business manager. Greathouse is one of the rich men of the coast. He has enormous interests, and Trent is his representative, — a remarkably fine financier, though somewhat conservative. In other words, he is the direct opposite of his brother, Cyril Trent."

"And what is Cyril Trent?"

"A fool."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean he is no man."

"I don't think I quite understand."

"Well," he said, with a short, sarcastic laugh, "perhaps Mrs. Laurie's stinging rejoinder to that assertion might be more comprehensible to you. She said: 'Mr. Gerrish means that Cyril does not



break the seventh commandment nor substitute Self or Gold for God.' It was an infatuated woman's opinion, but you may take it for what it is worth."

"He must be a freak," she murmured interestedly.

"A truly godly man," declared Gerrish, with another peculiar laugh. "As I said, a fool. That is his reputation among men; but being a good-looking, educated fool, the darling of the women. No doubt you will follow the lead if you are at all susceptible. I suppose you will meet him next Thursday evening at Mrs. Laurie's reception, to which I have been given a special invitation, and to which you will doubtless be asked. The Lauries are my one social extravagance — as with Cyril Trent. He generally favors them in some unconventional manner and attire, I have heard. You will have to curb your expectation until then, unless you want to go slumming at night, or would like to visit him during the day in Antony Trent's office, where he does his brother's private and foreign correspondence. Or you might go on a flower mission to his log-cabin with Anna Laurie some day. He's quite a wild man of the woods. Oh, he's a great play-actor — not by vocation but by instinct — all saints are, else we would call them by another name — and you ladies dearly love a buskin, you know. Plain man in natural habiliments is quite too low for approval. *Ah, que les femmes sont drôles!*" He picked up the bottle, refilled his glass, and drank it with a sort of flourish. He seemed to be laboring under some venomous thought.



But the next minute he laughed her questioning look aside. "Come, come," he said, "let us take up a more interesting topic. How have the years been treating you, Barbara; and how is it that you are not married yet?"

"'Nobody asked me to, sir,'" she said, looking quizzically down into his eyes.

"Oh, nonsense," he exclaimed incredulously.

"Truly, Bob," she answered seriously. "You see, I have a peculiar code. I have never met the man whom I would *allow* to propose to me."

"Eh?" he asked, not quite understanding her direct gaze.

"Exactly," she nodded enigmatically. "Oh, yes. One man did. He *would n't* see. He was a widower. Nature abhors the warmed-over, Robert."

"And so?"

"And so, here I am with my little mite, which will just about keep me in clothes and bread-and-butter, a college education, and a great big desire to get out and earn some lovely filthy lucre."

"None of that, sister. What's mine, you know — I'm in the ups just at present. The 'Riverton Times' has the largest circulation of —"

"Of course it has — they all have," she laughed. "But you must know that all I can take from you is your protection."

"Fie-fo-fum!" he exclaimed; then, recognizing the spirited firmness of her glance, he frowned, and was silent for some time.

Barbara broke the pause. "I must be independ-



ent,' she said quietly. "I have grown used to it. I would rather go away again than feel dependent upon you. You cannot fight that stand, Robert."

"You are not a new woman, are you?" he demanded abruptly.

"I don't know,—I don't think so. But do you know, I feel like a real old woman just now? I think I am tired, and want to go to bed."

"Poor little girl," he exclaimed, lapsing into his former easy *camaraderie*. "Come, I will show you to the guest-chamber; it is always in readiness."

He picked up the lamp from the table, and linking his arm through hers, led her upstairs into the large, handsomely appointed bed-room.

"How manly!" she remarked, noting the male appurtenances upon the dressing-table, the shaving-stand in the corner, the conveniences of the adjoining bath-room, the largeness and solid simplicity of it all.

"We sometimes entertain a passing celebrity here," he explained, looking around with some awkwardness. "But nary a woman. Is there anything I can get you, do you think, Barbara?"

"It looks quite complete, Robert," she said, "and so tempting. Which is your room?"

"Opposite. Trent has the south wing all to himself. Well, good-night, girlie; sleep well. I'll tell Mrs. Black about you in the morning."

"Good-night," she called after him as he turned away.

She seated herself in the great easy-chair in front of the dressing-table. Abstractedly, she let down



her hair, the dark mass escaping from its pins as with relief. She leaned back and closed her eyes. Altogether it had been a pleasant home coming. How genial and warm-hearted he seemed! — the milk of human kindness flowed quite beautifully and spontaneously from him. She loved him already. She was thankful for the gift of such a brother. And yet — the signs upon him, — the unquestionable marks of riotous living in the handsome, frank face. Pshaw! Perhaps she was unreasonable; perhaps they were only relics of his early bohemian days and adventures; and perhaps she exacted too much from a big-hearted, reckless man of his vocation, in this hustling, bustling Western town. She would learn soon enough. He had been so long from home and kindred. Perhaps she — She drifted on into a novel train of aspiration, an earnest craving to become an active influence in his life. She did not know how long she sat, or whether she had fallen asleep, when she suddenly started up, hesitated, then, with a musing smile in her eyes, softly opened her door and walked across the hall to her brother's room.

“Robert,” she called in a low voice. “Robert.”

“That you, Barbara?” came the sleepy response.

“Yes. Are you asleep?”

“Fast.”

“I mean, may I come in for a second?”

“Certe. Open the door; it is unlocked.”

She glided in swiftly, just making out the outline of the bed in the darkened room.



"I wanted to kiss you good-night, dear," she whispered, finding his face in the dark, and pressing her lips to his.

"Well," he murmured, catching at her long hair as it brushed his cheek ; but she escaped, and the next moment was out of the door again.

As she closed it behind her, she heard an approaching footstep, and, turning, somewhat startled, she faced Antony Trent, who was coming up the stairs, carrying a lighted candle.

He bowed gravely and deferentially, passing down the corridor with a look straight ahead.

"I had not thought of him," she murmured vexedly, putting up her hand to her loosened hair.



## CHAPTER III.

IN the West country they grow big hearts along with their big fruits. Wherever nature is rich and prodigal you will find a corresponding aspect in the soul and face of its people.

All Riverton came to visit, in welcome, Barbara Gerrish. "All Riverton" comprised about one five-hundredth part of the entire population ; but, through a preponderance of quality, it was regarded by its constituents as holding the surplus of power. Beyond its limits, they agreed that, socially, Riverton did not exist. Into this hierarchy Barbara Gerrish was, by right of the tradition of caste, naturally drawn. Humanity, like water, seeks its level. Culture, so-called, she found is a cosmopolite ; she recognized some of its indubitable features at a glance in this little Brahmin circle of the west. Equality, or the appearance of it, constitutes society. Though Barbara Gerrish had been a bread-winner in exclusive New York, she was well connected, and, up to her departure, might have shone by the lustre of her past, had she so desired. But, once launched in her independent course, she found herself somewhat out of joint with society's brilliant aimlessness, and had gradually withdrawn herself. In consequence of



which she had received fewer cold-shoulderings than custom generally grants to a girl in her position from near-sighted little Belgravia wrapped so securely in its illusions and furs. Riverton culture, abetted by the aforesaid western measurement of heart, shook hands with Barbara as with one of its own.

"Then I shall count upon you surely Thursday night," said Mrs. Laurie on her first visit, rising and extending her slight, gloved hand in adieu. "Your brother has promised to come, and Mr. Trent, — I hope he will have returned by that night — so you will be well escorted. They are very elusive and hard to secure, those two bachelors, and Anna, my daughter, is correspondingly delighted over their acceptance. You must try to make your brother love his Club a little less, Miss Gerrish, for all our sakes."

"I shall try to," she replied, looking into the winning, patrician face framed in its nimbus of snowy hair. "We are slightly strangers as yet, you know, my brother and I, and I suppose he has his best foot still foremost. But he is very accommodating. Perhaps it is the novelty of the situation?"

Mrs. Laurie smiled in answer to her wistful smile. "And the charm," she supplemented gracefully. "But we are not going to allow you to grow lonesome in these bachelor quarters."

"I hope to continue my work, you know," said the girl, moving with her to the door.

"Pardon?" murmured her visitor gently, standing still in the doorway.



"You know I am a work-bee," explained Barbara lightly, — "or rather, an A. B. ; I have been giving lecture-lessons on the poets, and had just accepted a professorship in anatomy and hygiene."

"How very pleasant and clever!" exclaimed Mrs. Laurie in a charmed manner. "How very opportune for Anna! She has wanted so long to find somebody sympathetic enough to read her poets with, and here you have walked straight into her desire. I hope you will be able to make some arrangements with her toward that end. Will you call soon and see?" She held out a persuasive hand.

A very faint hint of stiffening was perceptible in Barbara's attitude as she put her hand into the extended one. "I shall be pleased to have Miss Laurie call," she returned somewhat distantly.

Mrs. Laurie flushed, a quick look of pain darting into her handsome eyes. "She will come," she assured her girl-hostess, and Barbara felt, inexplicably, that she had been rebuked.

It was late afternoon of the same day, while she sat writing in the shadow of the porch, that Anna Laurie came to her, a frail, lily-like young thing, her golden hair braided school-girl fashion and turned up with a brown velvet ribbon. The great fawn-like eyes, the fine, pinched nose, the quick, panting breath showed painful evidences of the ruthless destroyer.

Barbara understood now the reproach of the mother's tone, and her hand grasped the delicate one of the girl's in contrition. "Sit down," she



said in her swift fashion, gently leading her visitor to the settee. "It is so warm. I might just as well have gone to you."

"Mother told me," laughed the other, her eyes devouring the tall stranger girl hungrily. "Mother — told me — all about you. Oh, I am all out of breath. Ah-h! There — now I can speak better." She drew a long quivering sigh as she leaned back against the trellis, and after a moment went on brightly; "I could n't wait to come — she said you reminded her of holly berries."

Barbara laughed caressingly. As she pressed the fragile fingers of the hand which she had not released, some of her vivid warmth seemed to communicate itself to the girl beside her.

"You see," Anna continued, "when Mr. Gerrish — your brother — said you were coming — I was so anxious. You know — your brother and I are — used to be great friends." A great ball of fire blazed up into her wan cheek. "So I was interested. Two years ago — before I grew so delicate — when I went about enjoying myself — he — was very — we were very friendly. We used to sing together; but I have not seen much of him lately."

"He spoke of you to me," said Barbara, her clasp tightening. "It was something pretty, I remember, because it left a pleasant memory."

"Yes? Did he?" The bright spot in either cheek burned hotly, her eyes flashed happily. "But then he would be apt to speak kindly of any one — except, of course, of Cyril."



“Cyril?”

“Cyril Trent — another friend. Perhaps you have heard of him?”

“Yes.”

“Ah, from your brother; I can tell by your tone. Miss Gerrish, why does he hate Cyril Trent so?”

“He considers him a hypocrite, from all I could gather.”

“Oh, but he is not. He is the truest man I have ever met.” She said it simply, with the simplicity of a child’s faith. A gentle, musing calm seemed to settle upon her. “He is strange — Cyril, of course; but no one doubts his sincerity except your brother. He is a dream-man, you know. He was always like that, my father says. You know the Trent boys grew up with the town, and Mr. Antony Trent is considered one of its financial lights. But Cyril is not to be measured by the ordinary standard, — he is simply a lover of humanity. He will love you — not because you are you, but because you are alive. There is nothing personal in his friendships. He seems to have his head in some high cloud, but all the while his hand is groping to lift up some stumbling creature. I love Cyril Trent.” She said this last, too, simply, with the simplicity of a child. “Some of the men say he has made a mess of it — that he is a failure. He had opportunities, it seems. But I don’t think he is a failure, nor do others — some of the members of the Pagan and Sunday Morning Clubs, of which he is an honorary member; the students of the Academy; the two boys he is supporting, and ever



so many others of whom we know nothing. Strange, is n't it, that he should be misunderstood by a man as kind and noble-minded as your brother?" She looked wistfully toward her companion.

"Robert is quick-blooded," said his sister, in defense. "And we are all subject to prejudice."

"Yes," laughed the younger girl. "That is why — Are we going to be friends? I think I need a friend — like you."

Barbara drew the slight hand closer to her. The new element which she had felt awakening in her on the first night of her arrival, put out another shoot. She was glad of the trusting suppliancy of this girlish sufferer upon her strength; in that moment she gloried in her superb, untrammelled health. "It is good to live," she thought, as though drinking deep for the first time of some rare gift.

She experienced a slight disappointment the following Thursday evening when Robert did not come home for dinner but telephoned his unavoidable absence. "Let Mrs. Black take you up to Laurie's. I'll see you there later," he said.

So Barbara prepared to enjoy herself, and made her entrance into Riverton society.

She was a pleasant feature in the Laurie drawing-room. Old General Grosvenor told his hostess that the girl was good as a reveille-call, and he stumped after her, his game-leg notwithstanding, whenever he saw a chance of ingress to her smile. Barbara had one attractive peculiarity: she never talked down to young men nor up to old men, but straight across



to them ; and General Grosvenor felt enthusiastically young, and Powell Laurie complacently important, and all the little world who spoke to her or looked upon her felt her charm.

Helen Greathouse was there, a pretty bit of flesh ; Barbara noticed her, later in the evening, talking animatedly to Antony Trent. He had come in late, his appearance causing some little stir and surprise. He had been out of town for the past week ; and, seeing him now for the first time in full light, Barbara was conscious of watching him with interest. She could not understand what the young chatterer could have to say to entertain this evidently quiet, reserved man ; yet he seemed not only to listen with chivalrous pleasure, but had met her half-way, and appeared to be speaking interestingly and with charm.

It was nearing midnight when some one said there was to be music, and Barbara, with anticipative eyes, moving from her companion to one of the open windows, seated herself upon the low, broad seat. She sat half-turned to the room, half to the night without. At the first sweep of the strings, she settled her back more firmly against the window-joist.

She had recognized, with surprise, the artist-hand. She could not see the player. With her face to the fragrant night, the music sounded far away ; she gave herself up to the spell of the moment. The dreamy sway of the melody stirred her to the depths. Her æsthetic sense was strongly developed ; she did not know what was played — she was a musician



only in temperament — but it harmonized with the night, with the grace of the surroundings.

And suddenly, as she sat there in the embrasure of the window, while the player played on, and the air pulsed with his music, she saw a tall form facing her, gazing into the room from the dim, lantern-hung veranda. At the first seeing glance she gave a half-start of recognition. It was the man with the peculiarly peaceful face whom she had seen the first night on the common. And just then the music ceased, and the soft, blue-gray eyes met hers.

“No one can play as David plays,” he said. His voice was grave and musical.

“Do you mean David, the beautiful singer?” she asked in the same quiet tone.

The stranger smiled. “No,” he answered. “I mean David Simms yonder.”

She leaned forward, following his nod, and saw a slender, sharp-faced young man, who, in answer to the repeated applause, took up his violin and began playing again, his head swaying to the tempo, his body rising on tip-toe to the ascendant phrase, his whole being bewitched with his evocation.

Barbara drew in a deep breath of pleasure as the bow rested. “Oh,” she murmured, turning again to the man without, “why is it that music sounds so much more beautiful in unison with the night than at any other time?”

“Because the two make a chord. The night is music,” he answered.

“Sacred music?”



"Perhaps. Its character depends upon the listener. To me it is organ music, — church music."

"Which church?"

"The eternal church."

"Is there any such?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"I fear I am a skeptic."

"You are with the times. But look out and see."

She did not quite understand, but, intuitively, she looked from his face to the night a-beat with stars, bathed in perfume, hushed as at a deep, grave Word; and again she looked at the peaceful, sad-browed man.

"They say that out of darkness comes light," he said slowly, as though philosophizing aloud. "Is not that the history of all birth? And so of skepticism and agnosticism. They are healthy states of mind, inevitable in the mass of religious systems and falsities which obtain. They pre-suppose the reincarnation of Truth. When the first man first saw the sun rise — I do not mean with his physical eye — the seed of the eternal church was born — church of Nature ending with Man. But the seed is now so overgrown and entangled with creed and dogma, opinions and discussions, that chaos is naturally the result. There must be a clearing made of the overgrowth before we can recover the abiding truth, which is too simple and radiant to be understood or gazed at without blinking. But there! — as Marcia Laurie would say, I am speaking out of order."

She was somewhat startled by his easy use of Mrs.



Laurie's given name, but there was no resisting the gentleness of his smile.

"Are n't you coming in?" she asked, her pulse beating a little quickly.

"Thank you, no. I will just sit here a moment longer with you — if you will let me."

"If you will," she said, a soft flush suffusing her face at the unmistakable note of pleasure in his plea.

He seated himself on the outer ledge, bringing his face nearer her vision. Why, she wondered, did she feel a pang of pity when she looked at him? Why did she feel this swelling of tears in her throat? Music sometimes affected her thus. Was it that his face suggested music, or was it only the effect still of David Simms's playing?

"You see," he said, "I always stay on the outskirts of Mayfair. I am not exactly fit to enter in." He looked down on his neat but unsuited attire — the gray sack-coat and white negligé shirt. "I often think I shall stay away altogether; but the music is irresistible, and Marcia says, 'Never mind the dress-coat,' and so I generally snatch a pleasant moment this way. Is Robert here to-night?"

"Do you mean my brother, Robert Gerrish?" she asked, a faint touch of distance in her tone.

"Yes. I knew you must be Barbara Gerrish as soon as I saw you to-night — not the night on the Common. But — pardon me — I see I have annoyed you. Ah, the name! — it is a branch of my little code to call my fellow creatures — those in whom I am interested — by the closer name. We



put too many barriers between one another as it is. The whole town, men, women, and children, who know me, call me Cyril."

"They have known you from childhood perhaps," she said, somewhat haughtily, without surprise over his identification. "I find conventions are generally social safeguards."

"Yes," he said, "most of them. Perhaps—in Mayfair—they are all necessary. But I do not belong to Mayfair—I am of the people. If I seem rude, it is through no want of deference."

Her face flushed warmly. "I think," she ventured in swift self-reproach, "that rudeness is a matter of tone, rather than of words, don't you? Then you could not have been rude. Have you seen Tot since?"

"Thank you," he said, a slight stain of answering color rising to his temples. "Tot? Oh, yes; she is a little Dame Trot again. She ran up and asked me yesterday where the 'Sweet lady' was— So you have come all this distance to live with Robert Gerrish? I am glad of that. Is he well?"

She looked at him with a flutter of misgiving. "Robert is very well, I think," she answered slowly.

He met her hostile eyes with comprehension. "I am afraid you do not understand," he said gravely. "But when you do, I want you to remember that I have tried to be his friend. Forgive me for annoying you, I meant no irreverence. Good-night, Barbara Gerrish."

She raised her eyes to his sad, kindly smile, but



before she could find the word he had passed out of sight.

She sat for several minutes wrapped in thought, then abruptly remembered where she was, and turned about. The room was empty. Where had they all gone? Or — ah, they were in the supper-room. She could hear the supper chatter and clatter, the popping of corks, the countless evidences of joyous life. She felt an uncomfortable alienation from it all. She had often experienced this graver voice of Self in the midst of merry-making, and only by force of will driven it to silence. And now she must drive the man's face and peculiarities from memory. She arose and moved about the room, examining the bibelots scattered about with minute attention.

The others came straggling in presently, and she was at once taken possession of by Helen Great-house and her escort, who, she was not surprised to find, was Antony Trent.

"We missed you at supper," said the girl. "I told Mr. Trent that I had hoped we should find ourselves near you, so that I could make clear to him the psychologic resemblance I feel you bear to him. But he told me to beware all human explorations. He said it did not pay. He was very discouraging."

"Mr. Trent was only philanthropic," returned Barbara, lightly. "What was it that cynical woman writer said? — something about its being better to be a satisfied hog than a disgruntled savant. Mr. Trent wishes to preserve your innocence."



"All the innocents are abroad," laughed Helen. "And I don't believe that was Mr. Trent's object. I'm afraid it was — cowardice."

"It was — partly," responded Trent quietly. "We all like to delude our fellows with a sense of mystery. We do not care to have our linings examined. In the pursuit of 'resemblances' I am afraid Miss Greathouse would experience some disagreeable surprises."

"Then you think that — except for outward decorations — we are all made of the same material?"

"Especially in the lining," he answered, speaking to her, or, rather, into her mentality, as equal does when it recognizes equal.

"Dear me," said Helen Greathouse, "I begin to respect myself." They laughed as she reared her pretty little head in exaggerated dignity; and just then some one engaged her for the contra-dance which was an institution, and the signal of the breaking up of Mrs. Laurie's Thursday evenings. Barbara and Antony Trent moved aside. He asked her whether she cared to dance, because it was an art which he had totally neglected; but he added that he would like to have her explain the figures to him, and she replied that she would prefer watching it out with him.

They were standing near the piano, and Anna Laurie passed them just then and seated herself before the keys. "I am going to play for the dancers," she said, striking chords at random, and turning her haggard face with a smile up at Barbara. "Are n't



you two going to dance? No, don't, please ; stand there and keep me company." She had struck the measure now, and the spirited music fell carelessly from her fingers. "I saw you talking to Cyril Trent just before supper, and I would not have you disturbed. I know what a first meeting with Cyril means. You did not mind, did you?"

"I did not notice," said Barbara, leaning against the piano, and looking winningly down at the weary young face. "I have enjoyed every moment of my evening."

"I am glad," observed Anna, simply. "And you, Mr. Trent, was it such a great bore after all?"

"It was a pleasant diversion," he returned. Yielding to the pitying instinct which made every one zealous to care for the girl, he moved to her other side and lightly drew up the dainty shawl which had slipped from her shoulder.

"And you could not persuade your chum to come?"

"My chum?"

"Mr. Gerrish."

Barbara gave a start ; she had quite forgotten her brother.

"Why, Gerrish never goes out, you know. He is quite as great a bear as myself," said Trent, with a quick glance from the dusky face of the girl opposite him down to the delicate one looking up.

"He promised," interposed Barbara. "Can anything have happened, do you think? He said he would surely be here at the end of the evening, and it is very late now."



"Yes, it is late," acquiesced Trent; "but he may have been detained at the office. He manages the editorial department himself, you know, Miss Gerrish."

She looked abstractedly past him. The girl at the piano had slightly drooped her head.

"We can walk home together, if you will," he supplemented diffidently, noting Barbara's annoyance.

She thanked him with abrupt courtesy. She did not like the situation; it was western, she thought. But the Grosvenors came up a moment later, and insisted upon her accepting a seat in their carriage, so Trent withdrew with a smile.

"You will give your brother a downright scolding for me," said Mrs. Laurie to her, as she said good-night. "Or you might ask him to come and explain in person to Anna — she is so disappointed. Take good care of Miss Gerrish, General, and don't forget to come for luncheon to-morrow, my dear."

Barbara threw back a happy assent. She found everybody so surprisingly kind, so evidently desirous of giving her pleasure. She thanked the Grosvenors warmly when they dropped her at her door.

Antony Trent was already in the hall when she entered. Again she did not like the situation, and felt resentful toward her brother for its being. Trent had little to say to her, however. He bade her good-night at the foot of the stairs, bidding her sleep quickly, with no further thought of Gerrish. "Do you always fall asleep at once?" he asked with unexpected solicitude.



"Sometimes. Why?"

"Because I should advise you to to-night. It is very late to get into a train of thought, and — well, it is better not to think. Good-night, Miss Gerrish."

"Good-night," she said, turning from him; and a few seconds later she had locked herself into her room. The next moment she heard Antony Trent go down the hall. "What an intrinsic gentleman he is," she thought, recognizing some element in him which it was difficult to define. "I wonder if it is that 'Puritanic bloodlessness' of his," she reflected with a smile.

She began to undress, feeling a strong disinclination for bed. What a jumble of thoughts she had entertained that night! She put her hand to her head with a weary gesture. No, she could not sleep. She slipped into a dressing-gown, and, picking up a book, sat down for an hour's quiet reading.

She did not read much. Long, lingering memories lay upon her mental vision like sunbeams of noon. The face of the peaceful-browed man, his eccentric entity, the gentle dreaminess of his effluence, affected her now like poppies, now like minor music. She found herself presently wondering, fearing for him, wondering what life would bring to a soul so alien to its institutions, fearing what harm might befall the dreamer and idealist in a world where each man is for himself and the devil for him who does not likewise.

Her eyes fell absently upon the page before her, and a sentence which she had been unheedingly



regarding for a long time, spoke grimly up to her: "Ici-bas rien n'est complet que le malheur." She wondered whether that were only the reflection of one in evil case, or the simple conviction of a philosophic spectator. Two visions came to her: Joy, with radiant face and yearning arms outheld, pleading to the fleeting day, "Oh, still delay, thou art so fair!" and Grief, head bowed on knees and arms fallen in impotent surrender at her sides. She frowned over the unbidden thought — she often felt herself struggling against such picturesque visions — and sat up with an abrupt determination to follow Antony Trent's admonition and banish thought in sleep.

But hark! What was that? Ah, the key in the latch. Robert was coming in at last. How long he was getting in! Perhaps Mr. Trent had locked the door. She would go and open for him. She moved toward the door — no. He was in. Oh! What was he doing, what was he saying? There! He was coming upstairs. What a noise he made stumbling against the balustrade. Her teeth chattered as she stood in sick dread. Oh, heavens! he had fallen. She heard a man's quick step approaching, and, turning the key, she wrenched open the door, facing Antony Trent.

"Go back," he commanded quietly, above the sound of sterterous mumbling. "This is no sight for you, and you can do nothing. Go back, please, and close the door instantly."

The authority of his tone impelled her shocked senses; she obeyed blindly, standing stunned on the other side of the door.



"Come," she heard him say in a harsh, peremptory voice. "Come, get up, Gerrish."

There was a moment's silence, then the drivelling, maudlin tones of her brother's voice reached her sickened understanding.

"Wha' sh-a-madder you, Trent?" he whined, sleepily. "Wha' sh-a-doing here? Damn you, Cyril Trent — min' y' own bushness — drink ev'y blame bottle left — if you shtan' there. You lemme 'lone. Kick y' out o' Club, you dam hyp —"

"Silence, Gerrish. Be still, or I'll gag you."

There was the sound of a lumbering body dragged forward. A door closed. A minute later it was re-opened; the quick step went down the hall again; a door was quietly opened and closed, and the vulgar, common-enough secret of Gerrish's dissipated face was understood.



## CHAPTER IV.

BARBARA arose the next morning, shivering in her awakening. What to do with the sorry knowledge? She was unacquainted with vice, even with this vice in its most fashionable form. She had read of it, of course, had heard laughing rumors of its presence in the lordliest families, encountered bestial glimpses of it upon the street, but had never before met it face to face in the person of one known to her. And the one who thus presented it to her was her brother — her one close relative, the only being on earth to whom she was bound. She felt suddenly alone again. The slight dependence which had stirred in her nature snapped up and left her erect.

She looked out at the morning just awakening under the peep of sun, and thought a brisk walk might clear her brain. She loved action — it was her soul's oxygen. She plunged into her cold bath, dressed quickly, and slipped quietly down the stairs and out of the house.

The purity and freshness of the morning cheered her at once. The dewy warmth of the air breathed upon her and strove like a moral force to wipe off the stain which clung to her consciousness. A happy



bird trilled somewhere afar ; from all around came fragrant country smells. Her face, stern at the outset, soon became only strongly thoughtful. She walked on light-footed. The early morning sunshine soon drives Care to its cavern.

One truth gleamed out to her : she would appeal to him. She would make him understand the hateful enormity of his vice. Warm words, stern, convincing arguments rushed to her aid : he must understand, he should understand. In her inexperience she felt no flaw in her plan. She did not say to herself, "I am going to kill a strong vice by a few strong words ;" there was nothing ridiculous to her in the hope. The trouble was that, like many other yearning women, she mistook desire for hope.

Gradually another idea possessed her ; at first small and unworthy attention, it shortly assumed grave meaning. What was Cyril Trent's influence upon her brother? Evidently baneful. In the short harangue against him of that first evening, hate had spoken eloquently ; in the muttered blasphemy of the night before, she had perceived the perverted effect of the man's ingenuous efforts. "If I ever see him again," she said simply, to herself, "I must ask him to desist. I shall endeavor to see him soon, and I shall not hesitate to speak to him." Her nerves felt firm and secure now. When she turned her face homeward, all sentimentality over the fact and its issue had vanished. She felt, perhaps, a little more solitary, but altogether hopeful in her self-reliance.



Fortunately we live surface lives; fortunately good-breeding has invented a light-weight uniform which enables civilized humanity to meet on a placid level without suggestion of individual irregularities. Discoveries will occur, but most people struggle to die game.

Barbara lunched with the Lauries that day, and was her own peculiar, attractive self. In the quiet hour afterward, Anna Laurie nestled down to her, and, instead of discussing the philosophy of the poets, they spoke philosophic poetry, and Barbara read an unworded story beneath the other's naïve utterances which gave her exquisite pain.

She was not sorry, therefore, when Helen Great-house came in, interrupting them with her breezy presence.

"Mrs. Laurie said I should come," she said, standing a bright, piquant figure on the threshold. "May I come in? You are not to be grave or thoughtful another minute. Mrs. Laurie says time is up, and I should come in to let you know. Annie Laurie — pardon the familiarity, that is what I heard some one call you the other day — Annie Laurie, do you like lollipops?" She put a small box of marrons and a spray of lilies of the valley into the girl's hand, and sat chatting gayly with them until Mrs. Laurie's motherly solicitude intervened.

"I want you two girls to help me," she said, appearing bonneted and gloved. "I am going out to do some missionary work in the business portion of town, and I want the eloquence of your youth to



assist my poor old moral suasion. It is for the 'Refuge' you know, Anna, and I must begin to-day. So you will sleep awhile, dearie; it is warm, and you must be tired. Would you like to come with me, my dears?"

Both Barbara and Helen were interestedly agreeable to her plan, and, bidding Anna good-bye, they sallied forth, with some curiosity over their venture in begging in these unacquainted quarters.

In their peregrinations from office to office, Barbara stepped back in humble admiration of the keen, hard-headed volubility which Helen displayed in aiding Mrs. Laurie's more personally persuasive demands for assistance in their philanthropic design.

"We must not forget the Adam Greathouse Company," said the girl, flushed with victory, as they emerged from the Granger's Bank. "They keep an open account, I know, for these assaults. Shall we go now? It is just opposite."

It was a hot day, and when they entered the large general office, the occupants seemed taking a siesta. Morton's pen snailed up and down mechanically, and Morton himself had just bobbed up indignantly — a feat he had been performing at short intervals all the afternoon — and glared defiance at the poor little office-boy as though he had been insinuating unheard-of things. But the glarings glanced harmlessly by the poor little office-boy, who, perched on a high stool, his head against the wall, had sweetly succumbed to the thermometer's beguilings, and was fast asleep, his mouth hospitably open. The two



other assistants nibbled their pens and endeavored to keep cool by talking of iced drinks.

Trent alone seemed awake and occupied. He had just emerged from the private office, and stood now in the doorway, speaking in a low but earnest tone to a man who leaned against the lintel, his hat pushed from his brow, vigorously chewing a toothpick. The three women, having refused chairs, stood waiting, apparently unnoticed by Adam Great-house's busy secretary. The farmer, for such his appearance proclaimed him, listened attentively, his eyes fastened on his shoe-tips, until Trent ceased, when the man looked up. The dark face, a little more colorless than usual from the excessive heat of the day, had lapsed into its wonted expression of reserve, as though a spring had snapped and cut off further communication.

"Well," remarked the man, in a loud tone, taking the hint and making a move to go, "I guess there's no getting round that resolution. Well." He turned back with a grin on his dry, shrewd face, and thoughtfully scratched the back of his head. "I guess the Railroad Commissioners knew their man when they made you their Right-of-way Agent, Mr. Trent. You're the rock, anyway, that splits our claim to smithereens. Well, I'm to tell 'em that's the Directors' final decision?"

"That is about it, Mr. Todd," replied the secretary, waiting with courteous distance of manner.

"Um-m," murmured the petitioner, philosophically chewing the cud of defeat. "Well, of course



you bloated capitalists don't care a continental about being generous to the freight-damned farmers when you can. You're offering a fair price for the land — and I suppose to expect anything more shows what fools we are. I guess the millenium ain't coming just yet. Well." He put his head abruptly in at the door. "Good-day, Cyril," he called. — "So long, Bill," came the cheery answer from within; and the farmer, with a dignified nod of leave-taking to Trent, walked across the room.

The three women in their dainty summer attire fluttered down to Trent just as he turned to re-enter the inner office.

"We have come on business," said Mrs. Laurie, the spokeswoman, with a deprecating smile.

"Woman's business?" he asked pleasantly, standing aside for them to enter.

"Yes. Please pretend you are delighted to see us — we promise to be brief."

As they came in, Cyril Trent, who was sitting at a desk at the further end of the room, looked up with a quick smile of recognition, and resumed his writing.

Barbara was disturbed by his presence. She felt this to be her chance of making some arrangement for putting her grave request to him, and yet she saw no means of accosting him without awkwardness.

"We have come begging for our Club-house," proceeded Mrs. Laurie, after they had again declined to be seated. "You have read of it, Mr. Trent, haven't you? The 'Times' printed two whole



columns about it. Don't you think it is a worthy enterprise?"

"I really must confess complete ignorance," replied Trent, glancing in rapid questioning from one to the other of the three faces, and back again to hers.

"It was Cyril's suggestion," she said, nodding down to the absorbed penman. "Hasn't he told you?"

"I believe not. We seldom discuss philanthropy together." He smiled the fine smile which meant nothing, and to which Helen so seriously objected.

"Well, could he put in a good word for us now? He can do it so much better than we."

"Certainly. Oh — er — Cyril, will you come here a minute? Mrs. Laurie wants you to be her orator." He looked pleasantly toward his brother, who laid down his pen and came forward.

"What's the good cause?" he asked, glancing toward Mrs. Laurie. The two girls were standing somewhat beyond, near the window.

"The Refuge Club," she answered.

"Ah, yes." He turned to his brother. He seemed to tower over him — the effect of his broad shoulders, for he was in reality little taller. "Perhaps you have noticed the number of slatternly girls and boys about the wharves, Antony, especially at night," he began readily, standing in sudden rigidity near Antony's desk. "The Refuge would be a sort of Club-house for these young people. Its plans include a library and assembly-room combined, two



class-rooms where lectures in the industrial arts may be given, a refreshment-room, kitchen, bath-rooms, gymnasium, and emergency dormitory. Many of our women have promised to read, talk, and amuse the waifs, and David Simms and one or two other artists will give them glimpses of and talks on the gentler arts. These last offices will be purely voluntary, but the patrons aim at regular paid lecturers. The object is to make the Club-house more attractive than the streets, and, at the same time, to give these worse than benighted young people — these nuclei of crime and pauperism — some useful industrial and moral principles and knowledge. I have not gone into detail ; you can understand how wide reaching, both civilly and socially, such an influence would be, to say nothing of it humanely."

Trent listened attentively. "It sounds practicable," he said thoughtfully. Mrs. Laurie had attended in undoubted surprise to Cyril's dry exposition of a plan which he had so eagerly originated and espoused. "It sounds practicable," said Antony indulgently. "I think we must lend our name substantially to it." He held out his hand to receive the subscription-book which Mrs. Laurie tendered him.

"Mr. Trent?" put in Helen, moving nearer as he seated himself and took up his pen. He raised his eyes with an interested smile to her animated, pretty face. "Please go the entire length," she nodded, showing her dimples. "This is going to be one of my pets. You know how papa treats my pet demands, and so, won't you —"



"Treat this one accordingly?" he queried with a laugh as he dipped his pen. "That is a strong argument — stronger than any of Cyril's, Mrs. Laurie," he added as he wrote. "And what does Miss Gerrish think of this western experiment in elevating our poor water rats?"

"It is not a new idea," said Barbara, watching his strong, slender hand as it moved across the line, "except for a few additions. These clubs are no longer experiments. They do no end of good, not only to the beneficiaries but to the benefactors. It is the personal nature of the attempt which makes it work well both ways."

"Yes," acquiesced Trent, putting in his decimal point with care, "if one has the time." He glanced past her dark face to Helen Greathouse's expectant one, and returned the book to Mrs. Laurie.

"Thank you," she said, a note of delight in her voice as she glanced at the figure and passed the book to Helen. "That is more than generous; it is munificent. Thank you very much, Mr. Trent. Come, girls, we must not —"

"Oh, wait," said Helen, with girlish warmth. "How can you be so forgetful, Mrs. Laurie! Of course this is very nice from the Adam Greathouse Company, but what is Mr. Trent going to give to sweet charity on his own account?" She looked up with charming persuasion.

Cyril had turned toward his desk, and Barbara, who had drawn a step nearer to him, saw his mouth set in a severe line of pain, as Trent answered with



distinct directness, "I am sorry to be obliged to answer you so, but Antony Trent is not at home to any calls of that nature just at present."

Barbara heard no more. She intercepted Cyril saying in a low, hurried tone, "I wish to speak a few words to you as soon as possible. Where can I see you, say to-morrow?"

His face was quite pale, his brows drawn; she felt that his thoughts were elsewhere, that he was regarding her altogether unseeingly.

"To-morrow?" he repeated heavily. "Oh, you, Barbara Gerrish. To-morrow? Can you come to Tot Lake's — the cottage next the Steam Laundry in Factory Lane — at five o'clock?"

"Thank you, yes. I shall be there." She turned from him with a ceremonious inclination of the head, and joined the others.

"Decidedly worthy," Antony Trent was saying, "but inopportune for me." His face had settled into impassivity.

"As it so often happens," interrupted Mrs. Laurie, with a careless smile of comprehension, putting her arm through Helen's and drawing her toward the door. "You have been extremely gracious to us, Mr. Trent, and we are extremely grateful. Come, my dears. Good-bye, Cyril," and presently Antony Trent was walking with them to the outer door.

He came back after a short colloquy with Morton, his stern face speaking of iron repression. "If you have finished that order to Carlos Jose you may go, Cyril," he said, seating himself at his own desk.



“Very well, Antony.”

After a few minutes the younger man arranged his desk, gathered together a handful of letters, and picked up his hat. Antony was looking through some papers, sitting sideways at his desk, his long legs crossed.

Cyril hesitated. “Antony!” he murmured hoarsely.

Antony looked up. Their eyes clinched, — the blue ones imploring, the gray ones cold, implacable. The next moment Cyril turned and went out.

Trent sat on. For several minutes the page he was studying was a hieroglyphic, a bewildering, composite vision of Helen Greathouse’s surprised, slightly scornful face, his brother Cyril’s pleading look, and some written words belonging to the limbo of the past. He had set his teeth and nerves, but several minutes passed before he regained control of his attention. The afternoon was almost gone, and one by one the men departed. Business was over.

Trent was alone — with himself. He pushed the sheets of paper aside and rested his head in his hand. “An unlooked-for set back,” his thoughts muttered. “One of those ridiculous small agencies which one never takes into account, and which can spoil the plan of a lifetime. The girl looked startled; such an *exposé* is momentous to an impressionable girl. Faugh! It’s the same old limitations, the same old bondage: ‘Your money or your life!’ — tautology — the one *is* the other. Why waste time and nerve thinking about it? Can’t strike out with all your limbs bound.” He set his jaw hard, arose deliber-



ately, locked the office-door behind him, and went to get shaved.

He met Gerrish at the barber's, and the two men took the car. Gerrish was dull and taciturn, and Trent made no effort to enliven him. When they reached the little villa, they found Barbara waiting in the dusk upon the veranda.

"Are n't you rather late?" she asked, her face slightly pale as she looked toward her brother.

"Guess not," replied Gerrish gruffly, pushing past her into the house.

She took her place easily at the table a little later. She had grown accustomed to her position as mistress of the house now, and although this was Trent's first appearance as one of the household since her coming, his presence was rather welcome than otherwise to her this evening, for she feared Gerrish's lowering brow. With Trent's assistance, however, they skimmed safely away from dangerous topics.

"Well, for a New Woman," growled Gerrish, unexpectedly, during a pause in their light conversation, "you seem to be remarkably interested in the society of this sleepy hollow of a town."

"New Woman?" repeated Barbara, ignoring his gruffness. "What do you mean by a New Woman, Robert?" She spoke gently, as one might to a sick child.

"Aw — a cross between a something and a nothing ; a woman who wants to climb the fence, catches her skirts in a nail, and commences to shriek for some one to come and help her over."



"Gerrish wants to know whether you believe in woman suffrage," interposed Trent, with a palpable effort toward softening the other man's contemptuous outburst.

"Do I believe in woman suffrage?" said Barbara, musingly. "Well, I don't believe in universal suffrage at all, so that stricture would bar out as many men as women. I do believe there are as many women as capable of casting an intelligent vote as there are men incapable of doing so. The mere polling of the vote does not take much time, you know. Still, you need not fear just yet; probably in a house to house canvass you would find only one woman out of ten who would care to take advantage of the concession. But if only one, are you going to make her miserable on account of her sex?"

"Want her to hold office too, eh?" laughed her brother ironically.

"Oh, as to that, I believe such spoils should be restricted to unmarried women or widows without children. You can't be a mother and a President, but you might be a mother and a school-director."

"There's an idea, Trent. Make the women office-seekers take an oath of celibacy. Ha, ha! Go pretty hard with the cause on that basis. You're a crank, Barbara. You're too good-looking to be a crank," he continued, with a return to his wonted good-humor as he filled his glass with apollinaris. "If you were homely or twisted there'd be some excuse for you. But as you are, it isn't fair to nature. You ought to be married, making some man



happy, and giving to the world strong sons and handsome daughters. That's what you were made for. Only some woman soured on the world would try to persuade you otherwise. No woman voluntarily sets out to be a permanent bachelor-maid. The newest woman in her heart of heart is as old as Eve, and only remains a bread-winner until she becomes a man-winner."

"I have n't taken the vow," laughed the girl, flushing over his downright, plain speaking. "But I think you are mistaken, Robert. I believe there are some unmarried women happier than some of their married sisters. I hate that phrase 'New Woman.' Of all the tawdry, run-to-heel phrases that strikes me the most disagreeably. When you mean, by the term, the women who believe in and ask for the right to advance in education, the arts, and professions with their fellow-men, you are speaking of a phase in civilization which has come gradually and naturally, and is here to stay. There is nothing new or abnormal in such a woman. But when you confound her with the extremists who wantonly disown the obligations and offices with which nature has honored them, you do the earnest, progressive women great wrong. There really are, however, some Providential, accidental women who are desirous and capable of extending their influence beyond their homes. There are some, I say. I am not one of them; I am a traditional woman. I agree with Thoreau in thinking that the fate of the country does not depend so much upon the kind of vote you drop into the ballot-



box every year, as upon the kind of man you drop from your door every morning. I believe that when a woman turns out a noble son or husband she is doing glorious patriotic work; and a true woman asks for nothing better. But think of the responsibility! If I were to marry I should want to be — well, a fairly decent wife and mother. I cannot do things by halves. Have you ever thought of the responsibility of bringing a human being into this relentless world of chance?"

"That sounds serious," said Trent, with interest; and Gerrish muttered, "A good changeling for empty arms to hold." Both men felt the charm of her earnest dark face, — Gerrish consciously, with a sense of pride in ownership; Trent submitted to it unwittingly.

"It *is* serious," she said, turning to Gerrish, "and just upon those premises. The selfish carelessness with which men and women fling hostages to fortune is monstrous. I think our marriage laws are entirely too lax — I mean the law which grants licenses to individuals to marry. I think both the Health Inspector and the Appraiser should have a hand in the signature. I think every candidate for matrimony should be made to show a clean health and moral record, and a certain fixed income or capital. I don't know whether the lawyers would like such a procedure, but the country would, — and the unconsidered children to be."

"By George, there's something lacking in you, Barbara," exclaimed Gerrish, in a tone of curiosity.



"You have no sentiment, no romance in your composition. It's not womanly. Would you prohibit all marriages for love, pure and simple, from your Utopia?"

"Not if they were backed by substance," she laughed, noting his aggressive expression. "Oh, I'm hard, — hard as cobble-stones, Robert, so far as my convictions are concerned. And if, of course, by 'womanly' you mean being sentimental and hysterical, I'm a freak. I know some women's nerves are left untied with ends dangling, at the mercy of every emotional power; mine happen to be drawn tight and fastened with a knot."

"For the master-hand to untie, eh? I wonder what kind of a wife you will make, Barbara," ventured Gerrish, somewhat diffidently after all these earnestly expounded theories.

"A very poor one probably," she returned, with a half smile into his heavy-lidded eyes. "I should exact so much, you see. I should exact as much as I should give. What that would be is not open to discussion, brother mine. Fortune so often laughs at our most stubbornly maintained ideals, that wisdom is in silence. But see, while I have been waxing warm, my dinner is growing cold. Why didn't you remind me?"

"We were selfish," said Trent.

He did not linger after his coffee. He said he had an appointment with the Directors of the new Railroad, and both Gerrish and Barbara strolled out to the veranda with him.



"Full moon," remarked Gerrish, leaning heavily against the rail and looking up. "The woman is there in open view."

"A woman in the moon?" questioned Barbara, coming to his side.

"You might know if there's a man around the woman is n't far distant. See her down there in the right-hand corner?"

"True enough," she murmured, the golden light falling upon her upturned face. "There she is, Mr. Trent, "showing her back hair done in a Psyche knot."

"She is a new woman to me," said Trent, observing the suggested outline. "She seems to have taken a high position for a new comer." He stood for a moment beside her, looking up, then turned abruptly to Gerrish, speaking in a low, confidential aside to him. Several minutes passed before he turned again to the girl, who seemed still absorbed in her lunar observations. "Good-night, Miss Gerrish," he said. He spoke with unmistakable kindness, holding out his hand to her. As she placed hers within it he was surprised to see that the lashes of this severe woman, whose nerves were fastened with a knot, were wet with tears. He turned away with disturbed interest, and the next minute was on his way to his Directors' meeting.

"There goes one in ten thousand," remarked Gerrish as Trent passed from view.

"Yes, he seems to be a gentleman," returned Barbara absently.



"That is hard on the other nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine," laughed Gerrish, taking out a cigarette and pressing it between his palms.

"Is it? I was not thinking of them, or — perhaps I was. Robert —" she plunged headlong into the whirl — "Robert, what are you doing?"

"Rolling a cigarette," he answered, elevating his eyebrows over her sudden intense gravity.

"I don't mean that. You know I don't mean that. Don't be flippant, please. It is not a flippant subject. I was so shocked last night. Robert, what are you doing to yourself? Put everything aside — for one moment — and look at yourself, face to face."

An ugly look gathered in his eyes. "Really, Barbara," he drawled, "I wouldn't begin to preach if I were you. It is a bad habit. You were very charming a while ago when you were lecturing on your own domain. But don't you think you are — er — trespassing? The moment a woman begins to preach she becomes a dreadful bore."

"I can stand the name. I can only not stand the misery of seeing you going morally down to destruction. Have you no regard for your honor?"

"Have you nearly finished?" he asked, an angry purple flush dyeing his face. "Because, if you have, I will say good-night. I am going to the Club."

"Not to the Club, Robert, I implore," she begged, drawing nearer to him. "If not for your own sake, then for mine. I need you, Robert. I understand now the pitying kindness shown me by the men and women who know you. Don't become



the disgraceful wreck you promise. Give it up and stay with me."

He turned upon her with a sudden fierce gesture. "See here, Barbara," he admonished roughly, "I hate interference. I shall live the way it pleases me to live. I have no need to account to you for my life — nor to any one, by George! Take things and people the way you find them; or if you can't, go talk to some one who will appreciate your eloquence more than I do. Try it on Cyril Trent. Tell him he'd better keep his damned, heavenly, interfering face out of my way, — if he knows what is good for him."

He swung himself round toward the door; but before he had taken the step, she seized him by the arm, and, with amazing strength, her other hand upon his shoulder, held him where he stood.

"I am about to betray a woman's unconscious confidence," she said hoarsely, her face white and dauntless. "I am about to appeal to the remnant of chivalry that remains to you in your better moments. It is the only thing I can think of, and you will respect the breach for the sake of the stake involved. I do not know what you were in years gone by to that beautiful lily of your valley who is dying inch by inch; but I know that to-day you are to her — to her alone — immaculate, noble, above reproach. She has made a hero of you. A hero — you! God help her piteous romance!"

The next moment he stood alone, stunned, confused, angered by her novel expedient.



The moon bathed him in mellow glow. He seated himself unconsciously on the settee at the end of the porch. He laughed once, a short, ironic laugh, looking down at the boards beneath him. A chill of irritation passed over him. He abhorred anything approaching sentiment. But he was not a bad fellow, — only coarsened by indulgence to an inordinate passion for a pleasant vice ; too weak to desist from what he knew was dragging him every day beyond hope of redemption ; too hail-fellow with his kind to withdraw from their genial companionship. It always began simply enough, by the usual gradations, 'First the man took a drink, then the drink took a drink, then the drink took the man.' It was only during the past year, when his indulgences had gone seemingly beyond his control, that he had gruffly resented any apparent interference, and, shrugging his shoulders, let the merry devil take its course.

Yet he was not entirely dead. The very venom with which he cursed the attractive figure of the younger Trent, who had late come among them, the persistence with which he designated him marplot and Jesuit, were earnest of the man's silent moral coercion upon him. His presence in the Club infected him like an incubus ; he ran amuck in trying to escape the power of his eyes.

Barbara's shaft had run thrillingly home. He possessed a deep fund of tenderness, this happy-go-lucky devotee of the cup. He had had a distinct liking for Anna Laurie in her merry, healthy



budding, had sought her out and made much of her in gay good comradeship. All weak and delicate creatures appealed to his hearty manhood, and Anna Laurie, in her sudden piteous decline, perhaps more strongly than any other. Her purity shone through her frailty like a star; it enveloped her like a fragrance. He always thought of her as some rare flower needing most tender care. That this girl cared for him — idealized him — confounded him with confused regret. He felt his unworthiness, and hot waves of shame swept over his conscience. The moonlight lay upon him like the glory of an unearthly, undeserved love. He buried his face in his hands; tip-toed a moment; and then — to heel again! Five minutes later he arose with a mutter and a shrug, and swung down the street to his Club.

And so from hour to hour we grow and grow, and yet from day to day we drift and drift. We raise aspiring eyes and arms to the high hills and heavens, and keep on in the easy familiar places. It is the riddle of Nature, the riddle of the Sphinx, — the beautiful, uplifted face of her and her animal body imbedded fast in earth.



## CHAPTER V.

**A**DAM GREATHOUSE was thinking. His daughter had just left him, after a conversation which gave him interesting food for contemplation. A few moments after her departure he had felt his heart beating at a somewhat uncomfortable speed, and had called his man Briggs, who brought a small vial and gave him a few drops of the contents from a spoon. Then he stretched himself out in his long chair on the porch, and began thinking more reasonably.

She had told him, after some circumlocution, of her encounter with Antony Trent's conservatism in the office, now several weeks gone. "You know," she said with a puzzled laugh, "I had been contemplating playing hand-maiden to fate, and drawing together your distinguished secretary and that splendid Barbara Gerrish. They seemed to me just made for each other. Do you remember that day last year when you gave voice to some very astounding assertions? Do you remember saying words to the effect that, of course, God might have made a more admirable man, but, to your knowledge, had never tried?"

"Well?" urged her father with disturbed amusement.



"Well," she said slowly, a musing look stealing into her young face, "he *does* wear well. I began to think — before that incident in the office — that he might make even a Barbara Gerrish happy. But now — I don't know whether he was restricted from limited fortune or limited sympathies, and I should not care to precipitate Barbara into the arms of a man troubled with either misfortune. But, papa, I should think a man in a position of such importance would command a decent salary."

"He does," said Greathouse bluntly.

"Well, then —"

"A man on a salary can't keep his hand in his pocket all the time," he interrupted abruptly. "Trent has more sense than sentiment perhaps, and he probably judged that the call did not warrant any extravagant display from him. Don't imagine because he failed you in this instance that the man is heartless or uncharitable, or any of the other names your enthusiasm might suggest. He only happens to be lacking in the vanity which might make a smaller man pan out to you or public opinion. A business man has more daily demands on his bounty or charity than you women can imagine, and there sometimes comes a moment when he must turn about and be charitable to his own interests. Trent is no fool, but neither is he a stone."

"Oh, no," she hastened to assent. "Outside of that once he has been very nice to me — probably more through his connection with you," she added with a slight flush of modesty, "than from any personal



liking for little me ; but he has been very nice to me." She paused, surprised at the sudden recognition of his "niceness" to her on the few occasions when she had met him outside of and in her own home. "He is interesting. Barbara must feel that herself. And he is good form, — in an unpretentious way. Then you think — it would be — all right?"

"What?"

"Making them fall in love with each other."

Greathouse laughed loud and heartily. "Little girl," he said, "don't meddle with what does n't concern you. You make Antony Trent fall in love ! Oh, run away, run away !"

Helen laughed too, with small feeling of hurt dignity as she went upstairs. She liked to consider herself of some importance in the lives of those about her, and an experiment in match-making offered both weight and amusement.

Greathouse began to think more quietly after his man had left him. He was conscious of a sense of loss, a sense of jealousy, and a very acute sense of annoyance against his daughter. He felt as though some one had been encroaching upon his interests. It was a feeling closely akin to the one which promulgated the late Presidential message against England's further usurpation of American soil. Unfortunately, European powers do not recognize the Monroe doctrine as a principle of international law. Greathouse was in a like predicament.

His apoplectic complexion assumed a deeper hue.



“What the devil does she want to interfere in Antony Trent’s affairs for?” he muttered. And then he calmed himself with a sarcastic smile over the thought of any one’s presuming to interfere in Antony Trent’s affairs. “Preposterous!” he growled under his breath, but the vague discomfort remained. This girl, this Barbara Gerrish — He frowned over her remembrance. She was certainly what Greathouse called “a fine girl.” Good-looking too — not pretty, but possessing a certain attractive individuality which was undeniable; somewhat opinionated perhaps; stubborn at times; although, he conceded, her stubbornness possessed a certain charm which only a churl would not perceive. And then, living as she did in this unconventional fashion, in the same house with him — propinquity is a great match-maker. Greathouse shifted uneasily in his chair. “He would make even a Barbara Gerrish happy.” “Humph!” grunted Greathouse, intolerantly. “Yes, and any woman,” came the determined, convincing corollary.

But — was Antony Trent a marrying man? He was old enough, eighteen years in his employ and owning to seventeen on the day of his coming — old enough, surely. Apparently not a carpet-knight, but possessing a good manner with women, — a manner which, except for a slight bending to the tradition of their sex, was not dissimilar to his courteous, admirable bearing with men; a cold, serious man of affairs, but a gentleman of high social rating in his little world, withal. No doubt one of the most eligible



bachelors in Riverton in the eyes of match-making fathers and mothers, yet, at the age of thirty-six, still unattached. A confirmed bachelor? How should he, Adam Greathouse, know? Except for one or two slight lapses, he had had no conversation with him upon any subject more personal than his salary. Come to think of it, most of their conversations had been headed with a dollar sign.

What did he know of Antony Trent personally? If he had an instinct beyond the business instinct or the keen knowledge of human nature he showed in dealing with his fellows, he had never displayed it to Adam Greathouse. Or — was this the only side to him? Nonsense. He had heard that he betrayed a fine taste and interest in the arts; an all-round, level-headed insight which enabled him to separate the true from the false, the wheat from the chaff, the abiding from the transient. “Except in music, for which he has no feeling whatsoever,” Mrs. Laurie once told him, “I know no man in Riverton upon whose judgment I would rely so implicitly.”

Cold, pulseless, was he? — Greathouse rather enjoyed his communings. — If so, would he ever marry? Would simply an attractive woman, such as Barbara Gerrish certainly was, win a man of his calibre from his calm? Or would he view marriage as he would a business proposition? Would he only fall in love when he thought the “accident” would pay?

Greathouse felt an exciting, womanish desire to find out. “Not for this stranger girl,” he thought,



with an angry laugh. "What is Barbara Gerrish to me? What is — Trent — to me? No, no — he is much — everything — except Nellie, of course — everything, except Nellie. Why —" And he began playing with his thought, pawing it, rejecting it, snatching it, fondling it, as a kitten plays with a ball ; and the upshot of his reflections was his going to the telephone and asking Antony Trent to dinner.

His excitement subsided after that. Helen found him rather grave and monosyllabic for her father. He told her that he had asked Trent to dine with them ; and when she informed him in turn that she also expected Barbara Gerrish, whom she had asked the day before without ceremony, he nodded kindly and said nothing.

Yet, despite the fact of this imagined rival's presence, Greathouse found a piquant pleasure in that dinner. Purpose gives the tamest enterprise color. He had intended sitting back judicially and taking the relative values of his companions, — taking their values and deducing possible combinations. But to his surprise afterward, he discovered that they had constituted him spokesman for the most part, and he remembered only that Barbara Gerrish's dusky face had been charming and happy, that her laugh had rippled freely, that Trent had lent his voice only occasionally, and that Helen had, with naïve grace, effaced herself as much as her sparkling personality could, with seemliness, accomplish. Dessert was being served, however, before he became conscious of his volubility, and drew in the bit.



He had been giving them some details in the histories of some of the prominent men of the town; and, after discussing Judge Laurie's abilities and foibles, he turned suddenly to Barbara and asked how Anna was.

"She fluctuates," returned Barbara, "one day down, the next up and happy. She spoke this morning of a European trip in the spring."

"She will drop off with the falling leaves; spring won't find her here," observed Trent.

"The Lauries will be inconsolable," Greathouse added. "I think even the judge always made more of her than he did of the boy. Odd! Well, he will still have the boy."

"And a very pleasant boy," put in Helen, brightly, dodging the graver subject for one more festive and in keeping with the moment. "We have been planning a tennis-match and rowing-race together. Speaking of rowing, Mr. Trent, reminds me of the river; do you know when the 'Nellie' will be ready for sailing?"

"She was promised for September first, — about a month off yet. Did you want her for any particular occasion?"

"I thought of giving a boat-party. I want to give my namesake a sort of christening, if you think the idea is feasible."

"Why not? If the weather is fair it would be an enjoyable means of entertainment, I should think."

"Yes, it would be delightful if the right people come. Of course I shall have to provide at least



two chaperons ; and with you there, Mr. Trent, I shall feel quite at ease, — it will be almost as good as having papa.”

Trent laughed. “ I shall endeavor to live up to the part. What are the duties of the *rôle* ? ”

“ Keeping in the background,” Greathouse informed him, filling his glass.

“ I am a star at that — with a sympathetic companion.”

“ With me — or Miss Gerrish ? ” suggested the girl mischievously.

“ With either — or both,” he responded, raising his glass and glancing from one to the other before he drank. As his eyes fell upon the bead of the golden wine, it seemed to reflect, not his hostess’s animated features, but the quieter ones of the dark-faced girl opposite who was speaking.

“ Give me the water, music, and the night,” Barbara said, “ and you will find me a decidedly stupid companion ; it will require a very forcible shaking to bring me out of the doldrums.”

“ Mr. Trent, I delegate you chief shaker to her Majesty, the Queen of Dreams.”

“ That is as bad as making me chief hangman to Pleasure,” he returned, looking across at Barbara. “ I refuse the nomination.”

“ Thank you,” smiled Barbara. “ That is friendly. And I hope the position will remain vacant.”

“ I promise you it shall not if I can induce Mr. Cyril Trent to come, — the dream-man as Anna Laurie calls him. Do you know, Mr. Trent, I am



often tempted to kiss him awake when he is using some of his enchantments upon papa. Do you think he will come to my party?"

"Am I my brother's keeper?" he asked; but before he had finished the trite sentence, a faint subsidence in his tone was audible, though, perhaps, only to Barbara's susceptible ear. She and Helen strolled off after this, leaving the men to their wine and cigars.

Trent turned the conversation almost abruptly to some details concerning his contemplated trip to the Islands. Greathouse answered absently and shortly, as though the question were of no concern, and one with which he wished to have done. Leaning upon the table and fingering the slender stem of his glass, he said unexpectedly, for all his leisurely tone, —

"By the way, Trent, about what was the profit in the lumber-yard last year, roughly estimated?"

After a moment's reflection Trent gave him an approximate figure.

"That is an advance on the year preceding — about how much?"

"About ten per cent."

"Ah — hm-m-m. Well, I was thinking I ought to make some relative changes in the men's salaries. Not belonging to a combine we can indulge more readily in a propensity of that sort. Sounds like some of your brother Cyril's talk, but I mean it; so give the whole force a ten per cent raise, and choose, for yourself, between a change to ten thousand a year, and a five per cent interest in the lumber



profits, together with your present salary. No hurry. Take your time to decide, but make the changes as soon as you can."

It was an unforeseen move. Trent turned white to the lips, and raised his glass to hide his disturbance. "This is unexpected, Mr. Greathouse," he said finally, in his usual undemonstrative fashion. "Have you fully estimated the cost of such wholesale generosity?"

"Nothing generous about it. A man can only spend his money once, — especially a man without a son. A rich man needs a son, Trent." The finger which knocked off the ashes from the end of his cigar trembled feebly. "Especially when he's got an estate like mine to leave. Gad, sir, what's the good of giving your whole life over to money-making if you've got to leave it to strangers in the end."

"You forget. You have a daughter," reminded Trent in courteous surprise.

"Yes, I have a daughter," returned the rich man, leaning his head back upon the cushions of his chair. He looked out bitterly before him. "Well, there's no use crying over what's gone. I was thinking to-day, Trent, that I've got to make out my will."

"I was under the impression you had done so long ago."

"Nineteen years ago, yes. That was before the boy died. I tore that up this afternoon."

"Ah."

"I must draw up another."

"You will want an attorney for that."



"Oh, damn attorneys! I want you."

Trent, his head resting in his hand, felt the tense cords of his temples tighten. He said nothing. He was used to Greathouse's profanity.

"As you said," the latter continued, "there's the girl, there's Helen. What is she going to do with it all after she has it? Buy a doll husband who'll show his talent by spending in humbug what I've given my whole life to acquire? Sweet thought that, Trent — using your wits for a witless stranger posterity. I'd like to hand over a million or so to her before I clear out, and see what sort of investment she would make. What d'ye say?" The hot blood mounted threateningly to the old man's face. He seemed to see double; he was drunk with restrained impetuosity.

"That would depend upon Miss Greathouse's clear-headedness," returned Trent lightly. "Generally speaking, I should advise no man to put off his clothes until ready for bed."

"Yes, but one wants to be doing something besides staying dressed. It would be rather an interesting experiment in financiering."

"A rather costly one."

"Not necessarily."

"For Miss Greathouse, yes."

"Not necessarily."

"Not if it were only a matter of business."

"It *is* a matter of business."

"Not for Miss Greathouse."

"Well, for the man, then. Helen aside, how do



you think such a proposition would strike a desirable young man?"

"Straight in the head."

"It would strike you so?"

"Me? I have never given matrimony much thought, Mr. Greathouse. It is not in my line."

"Not upon such terms?" He smiled excitedly into the other's pale, quiet face.

"That is rather a staggering question. A rather delicate one too, don't you think?"

Greathouse turned a deep, purple hue. "Well," he said, crushing a nut with his heavy palm, "I wanted to get your opinion. Just think about it in your leisure, will you? And give me your decision before I make out that will. It will give me an idea of the probable value of such a proposition to others. Here's to Nellie's investment." He drained his glass, his eyes looking over the brim into Trent's with smiling meaning.

Trent looked on. He knew that Fortune, in the guise of Greathouse's ardent desire for a trusted steward for his moneys and his daughter, stood at last before him with full paunch. But something, the social instinct, his innate refinement perhaps, withheld him from seizing it in open rapture. At any rate, an apparent innocence of the old man's personal drift seemed, for the time, the seemlier part.

Had Antony Trent's heart been used to singing, it would certainly have sung its great hallelujah then. But his was not a singing heart. It was a sedate, well-regulated organ, which, with one exception, had



gone on its daily way without any manifestation of rejoicing or despair.

He walked home with Barbara Gerrish that night, conversing in his usual gentlemanly, non-committal way as though the greatest episode in his ambitious career had not just presented itself. He was glad, however, that she was not a woman who exacted a constant stream of conversation. Mixed with his sense of haven in sight was the thought that the girl whose hand lay within his arm possessed a peculiar congeniality. Probably in all his life Antony Trent never enjoyed a walk more than he did that one when his dream of success lay so close within his grasp, and Barbara Gerrish walked so close beside him.

To Barbara the walk was quite colorless, — quite colorless except for the fleeting glimpse she caught of a tall, athletic figure swinging on in the crowd of Factory Lane, as she and Antony passed into quieter streets.



## CHAPTER VI.

SHE said to herself, "How his face and voice ring on in the memory!"

She said it the evening of the day after her meeting with him at little Tot Lake's cottage. Afterward, when she thought of that meeting, there was always a vagueness about it, — the vagueness of a shadowy, pictured city showing only its towers and turrets through a gold-shot mist. She remembered that there had been sweet talk with the child, and something of a pleasant nature passed with the horny-handed widowed father, Lake the cobbler. She remembered that Cyril Trent had been singularly at home in the lowly abode, and yet had seemed to fill it with an extraordinary beauty and brightness. She would never forget how, when he raised little Tot in his arms to kiss her good-bye, the child had buried her small hands in his soft thick hair, and cried, "Oh, the pretty gold! Oh, the pretty gold!" and Cyril had laughed out his frank, boyish laugh, which, for all its happiness, always ended in a quick note of sadness, as though its light had been cut off by a sudden reminding shadow.

They were walking slowly together through the quieting streets before she broached the object of her meeting him in this unconstrained fashion.



"I have solved your conundrum of the other night, Mr. Trent," she said in swift directness. "The *dénouement* has been played, and many things have been made plain to me. Let us not discuss its horror, please. I have a favor to ask you. Kindness of purpose sometimes acts malevolently. I know, through instinct, that your interest in my brother's welfare is purely humanitarian, but I must ask you to desist."

He threw back his head and searched her face in surprised uneasiness. "Will you — can you explain more fully?" he asked, with undisguised intentness.

She answered without evasion: "It is through my desire. I have learned that your 'interference,' as he calls it, only angers and goads him further."

"Strange," mused the man beside her, in a pained voice. "I had thought only to help him. I have never spoken to him — in words — to that effect. I have only dared to look warningly at him, hoping in that way to put the brake on his madness."

"But don't you know," she reminded gently, desiring to make him understand from the lowlier standpoint, "don't you know that vice resents nothing more violently than the reproach implied in the presence of opposing virtue?"

"Virtue?"

"As represented in your personality," she said simply.

He turned sharply upon her, his face going cold and gray. "You jest," he said impetuously; and, with a quick pressing together of the lips, he walked



on without speaking for several yards. Presently, as if throwing off a burden, he raised his head with one of his sudden sunny smiles. "Tell me what you wish of me," he said quietly. "It is hard not to 'interfere,' as you say he calls it, when the need of it is so urgent, when it lies just within my hand, and no one else seems to oppose him. Are you quite sure you wish me to let him go?"

"Quite. I know I can trust you. I know you would not wish to stand between any man and his successful career."

"*I*—stand between a man and success! *I* stand between a man and success!" He began to walk so rapidly now that Barbara was at trouble to keep up with him. He only slackened his pace when they reached the Common, when he stood suddenly, and looked steadily down into her raised eyes. She noticed that his face held a trace of weariness. "I could not do that," he said almost breathlessly. "I shall remember. Our roads separate here. I have something to attend to in town and must turn back." He raised his hat. "You have been very kind, Barbara Gerrish," he added.

"Oh, no," she returned in a pained tone. "I have hurt you."

"Hurt me?" he repeated in surprised cheeriness. "How could you hurt me when—when you have trusted me? This ostracism does not extend from you too, does it?"

"That was a needless question," she replied, holding out her hand. He made a movement to take it;



but before their fingers touched, a stormy wave of color swept from his throat to his brow, and his hand fell again to his side.

"Good-night," he said courteously, and he turned sharply away.

She wondered why he had done that, but she only repeated more concernedly to herself, "How his face and voice ring on in the memory!"

She said it to herself in the evening of the day she met him crossing the meadow just before the woods. She saw him coming along with a small boy, who carried a basket on his arm. He swung his hat gayly when he observed her, and they stopped to speak.

"Hank and I are going to do our marketing," he said, offering her a quivering little lily poised like a butterfly on its stem. "I found that this morning on the bank of my river-bath, and vowed I would give it to the first child I passed. You are the fortunate early bird."

"Child indeed!" she gayly mocked, drinking in its elusive fragrance while she fastened it into her button-hole with her disengaged hand, the other being occupied in holding up her skirt from the dew-kissed meadow grass. "How fairy-like it is! Well, Hank seems to have a pretty commodious basket there."

"It will have to supply three pretty commodious appetites, won't it, Hank?" he laughed, his white teeth, clear eyes, and pure skin gleaming with health.

"I should think so," laughed the small boy, wrink-



ling his freckled nose whimsically. "No flies on George's appetite."

Cyril laughed heartily. "Well, we won't stand here any longer putting riddles to Miss Gerrish. Till we meet again, then." He raised his hat and the boy's simultaneously, looking with a deep, swift glance of pleasure into her face, and walked on, cheerily whistling, "Oh promise me," a then popular song composed of an unusually sweet melody set to ridiculous words — the latter, however, the whistling only suggested.

Barbara held a theory that only happy, conscience-free men whistled. Often at night when she heard a belated passer-by whistling his way homeward she thought to herself, "There goes some happy fellow." Long afterward, when she looked at the shrivelled semblance of the lily which then trembled on her bosom, the exquisite melody of "Oh promise me" floated back to her across the dew-kissed meadow, and the morning and the flush of life again thrilled through her. But then, as she went joyously on, only the flashing thought of the poet swept over her like the rhythmic rush of a wing: —

"I crossed a moor, with a name of its own  
And a certain use in the world, no doubt,  
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone  
'Mid the blank miles round about:  
For there I picked up on the heather  
And there I put inside my breast  
A moulted feather, an eagle-feather!  
Well, I forget the rest."



Mrs. Black, serving her an hour later with breakfast, remarked the lily upon her bosom. Mrs. Black's volubility was quite incorrigible. She believed that when two speaking bodies came together they should speak, regardless of relative stations. The bump regulating social precedence was quite lacking in her republican brain, and Barbara always listened indulgently to her unending, oft-repeated dissertations on the families and individuals she had served and cared for. She had grown accustomed to lending an eye to her newspaper and an eye and ear to Mrs. Black during her solitary breakfasts, when the house-keeper's attentions seemed most effusive.

"Yes," she nodded now in answer, buttering her toast with care, "it is beautiful. An old friend of yours gave it to me." Oh, wily Barbara!

"A friend of mine, Miss Gerrish," beamed the good dame, her arms akimbo, after passing Barbara the berries. "Who might that be now?"

"The younger Mr. Trent — Mr. Cyril Trent."

"Well, now, did you ever! — Mr. Cyril indeed! He always was for finding out the darlings. 'Mrs. Black,' he'd say, 'there's winterberries for you, and laurel — I got them up the mountain;' and he'd bring out every crock and glass in the closet to make the house 'happy,' as he'd say. He was always for making things happy — was Cyril." And she plunged into a sea of recollections which sent the blood dancing in Barbara's veins, but over which she shook her head resignedly, thinking with an indulgent smile, "How she does run on!"



She met him now and then in the gloaming on Anna Laurie's or Adam Greathouse's porch, now and then in the heart of town — mere snatches of meetings which left little in the memory save a trembling radiance like a starry wake.

And once she entertained him in her own library in ordinary, conventional fashion. He had come in toward evening for a book, of which he had spoken to Antony, he said, and he found her writing at the table. The urn was steaming over the spirit-lamp in the corner in expectation of tea, and Barbara insisted upon his having a cup with her.

He sat down beside her, and they were quite cosy. Upon her permission, Cyril played chirographist from the scattered pages of her writing before him, and read her character curiously well.

"You are guessing now," she protested when he averred that she was strongly emotional. "You know I pride myself on my practicality."

"Pride must take its fall some day, some way, and even grow black-and-blue over it," he returned, with a teasing shake of the head. "I told you you were self-contained, mistress of yourself; you mistake effect for cause; you are not naturally practical, — you are intensely emotional."

"I shall take that as a warning," she decided. "And what other bad things do you see in my loops and terminations?"

"Do you call that 'bad'?"

"Certainly. Emotion is primitive; the more we possess of it, the nearer we are to our four-footed



predecessors, to our simian ancestry. To be colloquial, no human being who considers herself cultured cares to think she is likely to 'cut up monkey-tricks' — even under provocation."

Cyril laughed. "I never thought of the analogy before," he said. "But don't be disturbed. Those short terminations save you; you will 'cut up monkey-tricks' only in your depths. You can't escape nature, you know."

"No, but sometimes we can cheat her. Have you finished your tea? Pass me your cup, and I will read you your fortune in the dregs."

"No," he resisted, putting his hand over the cup. "I prefer to have mine read when I have reached the dregs."

"But just for fun," she pleaded, and he yielded. She came and stood beside him, and with pretty importance and puckered brows, bending over the faint sediment, she told him that it was all quite vague; that there seemed to be a straight, unbroken line; he would not travel much, she thought, until he came to a bar; she could not distinctly discern what it was, but it seemed to have filmy appendages, like wings.

"An angel," he suggested. "Good or bad?"

"Can't say," she responded slowly, peering into the fragile hollow. "But might it not be — a woman, or — Cupid?"

A faint flush reached up under his skin as he met her arch, merry smile. He shook his head, drawing the cup from her hand. "You are reading fairy-



tales now," he said with a short laugh, "and I don't believe you know a word about it."

"Oh, but I do," she assured him earnestly.

But Cyril had risen and was looking for his book, and the short moment was over.

She walked out to the door with him, and as they came upon the veranda, Gerrish, and Antony Trent, and Deschamps, the great French landscape painter, who was taking a stroll round the world, came leisurely up the steps. There were a few words passed. Barbara saw the sudden light of appreciation which burnt into the artist's eye when it fell upon Cyril Trent. "Superb!" she heard him murmur under his breath, as, with wilful impulse, she went down to the gate with him, yielding to an incomprehensible resentment against the air of worldly complaisance, the badinage they brought, the glimpse she caught of Deschamps's evening dress.

Later, at the table, her cheeks burned hotly, her tongue was brilliantly, volubly cynical, as though a tiny sword had been unsheathed. The artist accepted her delightedly, Gerrish and Trent with uncomfortable surprise.

"You are an anarchist to-night," said Trent, in a low, remonstrating voice, as he opened the door for her later.

"Croesus was n't, nor — the Angel Gabriel," she flashed back.

She moved swiftly through the hall and up the stairs. She was glad to get away from their talk, and buzz, and light. Her quiet shadowy room seemed a



welcoming refuge. She reached her open window and threw herself upon her knees before the casement. She leaned far out into the starry night. The strange, unreasoning resentment would not down, and she found herself putting her hand to her throat as though to choke down a sob. It was wrong, all wrong, her conscience murmured passionately. Why should he be debarred from the amenities and human delights of life? Why should he be lonely, and apart, and cut off? For he had seemed so to her, as he passed away in his humble attire. Her spirit rose in arms against it; she wished she could have spread her arms about him and so have shielded him from the appearance of loneliness and lowly estate. It was the fierce, protecting, proud, *maternal* instinct underlying the great love of every good woman, which struggled within her. "Oh, my love, my love!" she murmured, as, in passionate rebellion, she flung out into the dewy night the dusky rose she had unconsciously crushed against her cheek.

And Cyril Trent, walking under the stars, his hand upon the shoulder of the youth who strolled beside him, speaking of Orion's flaming belt, bewildering Lyra, and the dancing, spectral Pleiades, paused abruptly in his walk, and looked with a start about him.

"What is it?" questioned the boy.

"Roses," he said quickly; "the breath of a rose swept across my face just then."

"I did not feel it," said the lad who walked beside him.



## CHAPTER VII.

AND meanwhile they apparently kept on the even tenor of their lives. Day glided into day and month into month, and autumn came in its savage gorgeousness, and brought lingering, brooding hours of beauty to enhance both the dream and the battle.

Up in the Lauries' luxurious home on the hill the lily-girl was slipping into the shadows. Little River-ton walked on tiptoe past the house when it no longer saw her swaying in her hammock, fearing that a rude footfall might loose the white soul from the ethereal body.

Day after day a bunch of valley-lilies found its way into the shadowy hands, and whenever, for excess of joy and weakness, she would silently point them out to Barbara, the latter looked toward the fairy bells as toward a savior, and the fear which haunted her from day to day would for the moment subside. But, once without the influence of the sick-room, the remembrance of the countless nights, during which she had sat waiting in dread for the delinquent footstep which, as often as not, remained away altogether, returned to her in forcible bitterness. "It is easy to leave a standing order with your florist," she thought, with sad keenness.



In her endeavor to draw him more firmly to her she had adopted numerous little arts and beguilings which gradually grew to be her most striking features. From the somewhat brusque, coolly observant, self-sufficient girl who had come in the spring, she had merged into a gentle, wistful-eyed woman; even her peculiar swiftness of motion had given place to a slower grace, as though she had been taught to await another's pleasure. And yet she had not changed so much as she had developed; circumstance had only awakened the dormant possibilities of the woman. In the soul of the dullest may sleep the germs of a hero awaiting the *reveille* trump. In their occasional canters up lanes and across meadows (Barbara was an excellent horsewoman), in the novelty of her presence, in her consummate tact and management of not obtruding herself upon the established order of things, Gerrish had come to honestly care for her.

"But you are just a little too good for me, Barbara," he said, one day in a burst of recognition and confidence, framing her face with his hands and looking with droll helplessness into her eloquent eyes. "You're a brave love of a girl, by Jove! and I'm a hopeless sort; and — you'd better throw me over. I know you think I'm a despicable fool, but you must remember there's no accounting for tastes." And with his usual rough manner of caressing, he crushed her face against his shoulder, smothering the undesired words and leaving her with a dare-devil laugh before they could be uttered. But in his more ordinary humors he mentally dismissed her with the



appellation of "little Puritan," or "unsophisticated spoil-sport." In this material age it is easy finding contemptuous epithets for the virtues which would condemn our most delightful vices. Talk of the moral influence of woman! There are a thousand and one other stronger influences abroad in the world of men to laugh that presumption daily to shame. Out of the twenty-four hours of the day, Barbara was with her brother perhaps two — a small proportion to set against the whole. Besides, she was only his sister — neither his love nor his wife; hers was an imposed relationship; it had neither the divine grace nor the indescribable spiritual compulsion which lies in the ties of choice and affinity.

With her fine, critical practicality she felt her inadequacy. "He is indifferent to my judgment," she thought, with that cold resignation of heart which attends a slow-moving, inevitable decision of hopelessness. But outwardly she gave no sign of waning fortitude.

Helen Greathouse's contemplated river-party had been delayed from week to week until this last Saturday in September, when the Indian summer was at its heyday and the moon promised to be at its full.

"It will be a perfect night," said Mrs. Laurie, in the morning, as she came out of Anna's room with Barbara and stood for a moment's converse in the doorway. "I was sorry not to be able to help chaperon the affair, but Mrs. Grosvenor will be a host of duennas in herself. You will come in to-morrow to tell Anna all about it, won't you?"



"Of course I shall," she laughed pleasantly. "There is nothing I enjoy more than retailing the details of a pleasure of that sort, especially to one as appreciative as Anna. I am not a gossip, but I do enjoy scenting possibilities and commenting on the deportment and appearances of those worth noticing, don't you?"

"Honestly, yes, and we won't call it gossip until it degenerates into spitefulness. Until then let us call ourselves commentators. But, speaking of gossip, I suppose you have heard the latest interesting rumor? It concerns your house."

"My house?" repeated Barbara, opening her eyes in innocent wonder.

"Mr. Trent," returned Mrs. Laurie, "Mr. Antony Trent."

"No!" murmured Barbara, giving a frank, answering attention. "What is it about?"

"They say he is paying very marked attentions to Helen Greathouse."

"Indeed! But then I don't suppose it means anything more important than a worldly sense of dutiful interest in his employer's daughter. They do not seem at all suited."

"My dear, that daughter will some day be one of the wealthiest heiresses in the State."

"I thought you liked Antony Trent."

"I do. I admire him immensely, but that does not prevent my understanding his stand in such an issue. He is the most thoroughly consistent man I know."



“Ah,” mused Barbara with comprehension. “What a cold-blooded consistency it seems. And yet, if it — the rumor — takes form, I have no doubt he will make an admirable husband.”

“Admirable is the word,” responded Mrs. Laurie, holding Barbara’s hand in good-bye. “You won’t forget Anna’s message, will you?” Her tired face flushed slightly over the question.

Barbara pressed her hand in response.

She was thinking of this tidbit of worldly gossip, and of the romance of Anna Laurie’s faltering request, as she sat under the peach-tree that afternoon, nibbling her pen reflectively before beginning her weekly letter-writing.

The peach-tree stood on the back premises, its great, spreading, unpruned branches sprawling over the ground at their own untamed will. A rustic table encircled its trunk, and a number of rustic chairs stood near. The late fruit hung heavy from the branches, the downy crimson and luscious gold cheeks exhaling a delicious peachy fragrance. Through the sunny leaves she could see the roof of the stable. Now and then the groom’s voice reached her in spasmodic exclamations to the horses. Otherwise, all was still. Not a trace of cat or dog disturbed the air of desertion about the Gerrish grounds; the unused kennels, huge chicken-house, and rather commodious pig-sty claimed no occupants. Gerrish’s tastes were not of the bucolic, domestic variety — a fact for which Barbara was duly grateful in the heat of the brooding peach-fragrant air.



She dipped her pen again and leisurely wrote the date. Then she began : —

“My dear friend,” —

She paused in doubt. Her pen re-accentuated the comma, retraced the “M,” redotted the “i,” hesitating absently before proceeding. She was afraid it would not be a happy letter, and Barbara was always carefully studious not to allow any depressing mood of the moment to creep into her distant communications. The sadness of her thoughts showed itself in the drooping corners of her mouth.

Robert had not come home the night before, and experience had taught her that his appearance in the evening would not be reassuring. She was beginning to chafe under the haunting fear, in conjunction with which Anna Laurie’s feverish, gentle plea that he should come and sing for her the following evening, had seemed bathotic and grotesque in the extreme. In her abstraction, she pressed the point of the pen so deep into the gnarl of the table that it snapped in two, and she threw it down, leaned her elbows on the table, and sank her chin upon her clasped hands.

Her impotence assailed her with impatience. Some other chastisement than her woman’s wordy or silent beseechings was requisite ; some man’s powerful influence ; not the fine moral influence of Cyril Trent, she thought with a rush of strong emotion ; he, Robert, was not open to such suasion — and she put him resolutely aside. At the same time his brother’s cold, courteous personality presented itself as the friend of Robert Gerrish, a friend to whom Gerrish paid staunch, unstinted



admiration and homage. Perhaps, if appealed to, he would use his influence more actively. If not, there were the Cures — if he cared. There lay the trouble — he did not care. She drew a long breath of irresolution, setting her teeth against her natural abhorrence of appeal of any sort, and the knowledge that a failing of that nature is tenacious as a leech.

At that moment she heard a slow step behind her, and she looked hastily around.

“Why, Robert!” she exclaimed in glad surprise as he drew near.

He wore an air of weighty gravity. His hat was pulled low over his nose; he walked with some hesitation. As he came up, he made a low, sweeping bow.

Barbara looked at him with a sense of fear the while he seated himself heavily beside her. “Has anything happened?” she asked at length in controlled anxiety.

“I desire to speak to you, if you have the leisure to attend.” Her heart thumped painfully; this carefully stilted diction, the elaborate courtesy of his manner, the pallor of his countenance, were all so contradictory to Robert’s usual careless, unpolished self that her wondering alarm grew proportionately. “Your pardon,” he added after a moment, removing his hat and placing it upon his knee. What did this unnecessary display of etiquette portend? Why was he so slow to speak? Or was he merely giving himself time before divulging some shocking news?

“I wish you would go on,” she said, vehemently. “This delay is very inconsiderate.”



"Do not excite yourself," he advised quietly. "I have approached you in the character of your guardian, with no ulterior motive in view than that of your welfare. Have we the premises entirely to ourselves?"

She looked around through the drooping branches. "Entirely," she returned, with blanched lips.

"You understand that what I have to impart is strictly confidential?"

"Yes."

"Last evening I saw you walking through the Common with Cyril Trent."

"Well?"

"It is of your connection with this man that I desire to speak."

"My connection!"

"I desire it to cease."

"I do not understand you."

"I will repeat: I do not wish your connection with Cyril Trent to continue. I will countenance no dishonor."

Her cheek flushed hotly, her eyes blazed with anger. "You are insulting," she retorted distinctly.

"I want you to take back those words."

"Impossible."

"Take back those words or — explain yourself." Her temper was roused; her face was dark and threatening.

"I meant no insult to you. I wished to warn you. That man has a history, — an unsavory one."

"Who told you that?"



"I know."

"Who told you, I asked. Where did you get your knowledge?"

"Instinct told me."

"Pooh!"

"Instinct — the child of experience — you cannot cheat it. Why does he pursue this sham of modesty? Why does he not make himself known beyond this hole, with the talents he is supposed to possess? Why did he leave a lucrative berth for one so obscure — at a night's notice? That man is a scoundrel."

"You are speaking of my friend. Take care." She spoke in deadly calm now.

"You must be his friend no longer."

"Indeed? I have always found myself capable of choosing my own friendships."

"You must renounce this one."

"I shall not."

"You shall."

"Are you crazy?"

As she said the word a sudden suspicion took her, and she looked at him more closely. She arose with distended eyes. "You are drunk," she ejaculated, with a mixture of physical fear, relief, sorrow. "You are drunk, sir."

He regarded her with tipsy gravity. Then he arose unsteadily to his feet. The effort was too much for him, however. He lurched forward over the table, might have fallen prone had she not caught him by the arm and almost steadied him.



“Stand up!” she ordered roughly, holding him at arm’s length with a muscle of iron.

He began mumbling to her maudlin, endearing terms which sickened and shamed her. She pushed him forward, striving to close her hearing to the sound. He tottered backward in her hold, and suddenly fell headlong over a trailing branch of the peach-tree. He lay quite inert, and, to add to the ignominy, his head rested just within the opening of the pig-sty.

“Behold the man!” she thought, with miserable perspicuity — “the noblest work of God — drunk in a pig-sty!”

And then a startling idea seized her — to leave him there; the shock of the lesson, the sensation of degradation! Yes, yes. She turned feverishly away, gathered up her writing materials, and flew from the place in mad haste.

She locked herself in her room as though to evade a pursuer. She tried to stifle the memory of his drunken words; but who is impervious to such whisperings? Fancies, to which she had given no form, now sprang live, full-breathing at this touch. She walked the floor as though trampling, stamping out a foe. Metaphorically, she raised her hand against her own disloyalty. “It is a lie,” she said with stern conviction. But the thought of Robert lying out there rushed in upon her and turned her violently from the wretched thought.

Suppose the groom, the cook, Mrs. Black, a tradesman — who not? — should see him there! Love



aside, pride will always seek to guard the infirmities of its possessions from the ridicule of alien eyes. It is, perhaps, one of the selfish, cowardly attributes of love, but from it emanate some of the most pathetic tragedies of history. There is nothing in life more tragic than its silences.

"He is your brother," came the voice, and all the growing tenderness within her welled to her consciousness. She turned to the door with human inconsistency, and crept stealthily downstairs. There is nothing in life more consistent than inconsistency.

She must get him into the house before a possible discovery — this was her one concern. She came upon him, white-faced and dauntless.

"Robert," she called, bending over him ; "Robert."

He gave no sign, and she shook him by the shoulder with like ill success. She wrung her hands in agony as she looked despairingly down at his heavy, handsome proportions. "I must rouse him," she decided ruthlessly, and she went in search of water. Five minutes later, dripping, blinking, swearing, he opened his eyes and attempted to sit up.

"Come," she said, putting her strong arm beneath his head, "come, you have fallen, and I must get you to your feet." Her glorious strength manifested itself in her desperate struggle with his brutish helplessness. Pale and panting, she finally got him upon his feet and held him there. Then, putting her shoulder under his, her arm about his girth, she led him on, resisting his desire to sit down, guiding his



footsteps, bearing his weight, as only trained muscles and heroic courage can accomplish.

She did not relax till she had brought him to the door of his room, when, utterly spent, she pushed him toward the divan. He lunged to the bureau, and as he clutched the edge, he caught sight of his own face in the glass and raised his fist to strike.

Barbara sprang to stay him. "Le'-go," he growled, turning upon her with a glimpse of sobriety, and throwing off her arm.

"Yes, Robert," she faltered, more afraid of him in this state than in his utter senselessness. "But go to the couch and lie down."

Unthinkingly, she had put her hand upon him again, and, before she could evade the blow, he had seized a silver-backed brush and thrown it at her head.

She stood stunned, unmindful of the pain, gazing in bewilderment at his white, threatening countenance. Then she turned and went silently away, closing the door securely behind her.

She walked into her room, moved involuntarily over to her dressing-table, and looked at herself.

"I am cut," she addressed her image, confusedly regarding the long, straight wound in her temple. A drop of blood fell upon her hand. "Dear, dear! I must dress it at once." She shivered, as though suffering from an internal bruise; but her eyes were bright and dry while she bathed and dressed the wound, and applied the adhesive plaster with firm, practiced fingers.

"I hope it will not show," she thought as she



fluffed her soft hair over it in the same dazed, impersonal manner.

She glanced at her watch and saw that it was time to dress for dinner. "Antony Trent will be home," she thought, proceeding with her toilet.

She heard him come in shortly after and go to his room. An hour later she met him in the library.

"This is the night of the boat-party," he observed, as they seated themselves opposite each other as usual, after they had repaired to the dining-room and she had explained that they would not wait for Robert. She was oblivious of "the situation" to-night.

"Yes," she said, while Ching passed the soup; but the little start in her voice was not unperceived.

"You are going, are you not?" he asked, looking at her quickly and picking up his spoon.

She was eating with mechanical indifference. "No," she returned. "I do not feel — I do not feel in the mood." It was impossible to prevaricate in the slightest degree under his level glance.

"Miss Greathouse will be disappointed."

"Perhaps," smiled Barbara. She put down her spoon and gazed in wide-eyed abstraction before her.

Trent finished his soup absently. The great bunch of red carnations upon the table filled the room with spicy fragrance; the windows were thrown open, and the night air tempered the heat of the softly shaded lamps. Trent had never seen Barbara in just such a mood before. She was rather pale, too, and a certain tremulous humility made her unconsciously appealing. Trent felt the piquancy of the hour.



"And Mrs. Laurie will not be present either, I hear," he remarked, as the soft-footed Ching, after serving the trout and filling his glass, retired to the background of the pantry. "Imagine the improprieties her absence will encourage."

She toyed with her food, but made no response to his lead. "It will be a very lovely evening," she said, with an effort at being companionable. "Helen has shown exquisite taste in her arrangements."

"I think it will be pleasant. But you are not eating, Miss Gerrish."

"What time do you start?" she asked, ignoring his polite solicitude.

"At 8-30 sharp. The moon will be up by nine. I trust nothing has occurred to spoil your pleasure and appetite. No bad news?"

She shook her head, speechless for a moment. Then, "I'm afraid you are not enjoying your dinner," she said, striving to forget herself. "In a *solitude à deux* good-fellowship demands that both parties be agreeable; so give me a little of that wine and I will be happier with you. It looks so bright — no, no, don't. I don't want any."

He hesitated over her capricious demands and put the bottle down. Ching came and went with the savory viands, unnoticed by her; she seemed removed from her surroundings.

"You are childish," he reproached her pleasantly, a novel, personal feeling stirring him to unusual gentleness of expression. There was a faint touch of red in his thin, dark cheek. "Come, you must



taste this squab. I guarantee its excellence. As a favor?"

"How insistent you are! Well, to please you, then — although I don't feel — in the mood."

"Mood? Is appetite a mood? Do you know you use that word rather unduly often?"

"Do I? That is because I think so much of life is dependent upon it?"

"But it is controllable."

"Oh, yes, if we knew there was anything to control. But we generally give in thoughtlessly enough. We are often unjust through mood, Mr. Trent."

"Yes? I do not think I am."

"And we are often too merciful through mood. I was thinking the other day that even Love, Love with a great big capital letter, is the result and sport of mood. Don't you agree with me?"

"I have not given the subject much thought."

"No? I suppose women do think about it more than men. Having the leisure they paraphrase the subject, as it were, and draw it out to the bitter end. Leisure is a great mischief-maker. I am glad I have been a working-woman. It is healthier — sometimes. Sometimes! You see — there it crops up again; everything is good or bad according to your mood. But about this Love — I will give you the benefit of my leisure communings on the subject during the past few months. I believe Love is a carefully-nurtured mood — a developed mood. If a man or a woman answer your mood of the moment, the feeling might grow to Love if you fed it well. Therefore, in



every being there are possibilities of several kinds of Love. Love is a Mormon."

"You are talking so much that you have forgotten to eat again. And you are talking rather wildly."

Her cheeks were vividly flushed, her eyes brilliant. She was beautiful. Trent's senses acknowledged it. He had never thought her so before.

"Miss Gerrish," he said, leaning slightly toward her and speaking in a peculiarly low tone, "put your mood aside and come with me to the river-party to-night."

She leaned her elbow on the table, her head in her hand. She picked for a moment at some bread-crumbs beside her plate. "Mr. Trent," she began in soft-voiced sadness. Then she paused. He was regarding her in intent quiet. "Mr. Trent," she went on, raising her eyes, and, to his dismay, he saw they were dim with tears, "do you consider yourself a friend of Robert Gerrish?"

"I have always considered myself so."

"Then how can you let him go on in this fashion without offering a protesting word? How can men do such things and profess to be friends! How can they! how can they!"

"I am ready to do what I can for you, if you will tell me what that is."

"He admires you; your good opinion is valuable to him. If I were a friend to a man, if I saw any man I cared for going down-hill — going to ruin and — dragging the happiness of — others with him — I should interfere — I should force him to draw up."



“How?”

“I should speak to him.”

“I have spoken to Gerrish.”

“What have you said, — told him he had better desist?”

“Words to that effect.”

“Have you ever shown him contempt; have you ever threatened to withdraw your friendship if he persisted?”

“Robert Gerrish’s friendship is of great value to me.”

“But — ”

“Men do not quarrel so easily with their good-fortune as you would advise, Miss Gerrish.” He was looking at her now with steely brightness, honest and firm as usual in thus stating his life-tested convictions.

She regarded him in startled questioning. “Not to save a friend from destruction?” she murmured protestingly.

“One might not save the friend — and so would be wantonly throwing away something valuable. In nine cases out of ten it would be merely a losing proposition. A foolish proceeding.” He smiled at her with what Helen called his ready-made smile.

She met his eyes with a wondering look. “I am disappointed in you,” she said slowly.

The colorless, excluding expression settled upon his face. “It is a mannerism of mine to tell the truth about myself, — at the risk of losing the good will of many whose good will I desire.” He appeared and felt both cold and distant.



He arose soon after, but she made no movement, looking abstractedly before her.

“Good-night, Miss Gerrish.” His voice sounded unfamiliar, gruff, even to his own ear.

“Good-night, Mr. Trent,” she answered coldly, without glancing toward him.

He walked to the door, turned with his hand on the knob, and came back to her. “Miss Gerrish,” he said quietly, “it distresses me greatly to part from you in this — mood.” He laughed shortly over the word. “I will do my best with Gerrish, in my own way.”

She looked thoughtfully up at him. “You are very kind,” she said courteously.

“Will you give me your hand?” He held his out toward her, and with a fluttering smile she placed hers in it. He bent over it a second, and passed hurriedly from the room.



## CHAPTER VIII.

SHE sat in dreary solitude. She felt distant, repulsed. Yet what right had she to expect a concession of such magnitude from a comparative stranger? He had been only singularly honest in stating his views and refusal, and she had been too weak to support it. The man's logic of egoism compelled her reluctant approval. After all, she thought, we have no right to obtrude our burdens upon others. It is "Kentucky treat" all around, and each has his own obolus to pay. The god of grief knows no nepotism — of each he demands recognition some day, some way. Salute and pass on in silence. After you — the next !

Her head was throbbing ; she felt weighted with the pain of the world and her own loneliness. Feeling herself choking, she arose hurriedly and walked blindly into the library out of the reach of eyes.

She gave her weariness and dejection full play as she threw herself into a chair and indulged herself in a dull fit of crying. Barbara had allowed herself few such indulgences. She was too healthy, too active ; life had demanded fortitude and self-possession of her in all things at all times ; her very being had depended upon her own self-control ; her interests had been,



up to her coming to live with her brother, the fruits of her own ventures and abilities — hers was a strong, silent, self-reliant nature, asking quarter of none. It is a bitter truth that, as soon as we come out of our shell and cast in our lots, hopes, and fortunes with another, we come the sooner to grief. Barbara's strength was not sufficient to keep her brother in step with her.

With her head on the library table, her arms flung out, she sobbed on dully. And after the storm was spent and only an occasional moan disturbed her prostrate form, she felt wistful as a child who longs for comforting words and caressings. In this state, her tear-swollen eyes gazing into the shadowy obscurity, she yielded to the imagined voice, the imagined touch and tenderness of the only one for whom in her weakness she yearned. She smiled sadly over her foolish doubts of the afternoon, and presently she was comforted, and she sat up in hushed gentleness.

In the reaction of feeling, she remembered with startled self-reproach that she had promised Cobbler Lake to bring a glass of jelly that afternoon to his little fever-stricken Tot. The events of the day had left her wholly oblivious to any need but her own. "I will go down with it now," she thought, a musing softness passing over her tear-stained face at thought of the sick child. "It is half-past eight," she reflected. "The party will be off, and I shall meet no one whom I know."

She was not afraid of the night, and in the



moment's necessity of being about something, of escaping from the house and its fearsome occupant, she gave no consideration to the unconventional independence of such a visit at that hour. She stole breathlessly upstairs, got her hat, jacket, and gloves, and was soon walking in almost an ecstasy of calm down the deserted avenue.

The streets in the heart of town were filled with the usual Saturday-night crowd, but she scarcely realized the presence of others as she kept on her way, and came at last into the small cottage where the child tossed in the fever born of the marsh. Her coming with the cooling jelly was welcome and delightful to the little invalid, and Barbara, after refreshing the fretted body, took her in her arms and sang both father and child to sleep, and herself to ease. The short, ministering visit soothed and strengthened her, and when she came again into the street, she felt quite herself.

She walked on, her head held high, with her usual unconscious dignity. She had little thought of self. Had she felt any, she could not have passed so fearlessly through the low, rowdy-infested portion of the town, where the noisy Saturday-night revellers were now in full war-cry. A man reeled past her, and when she started aside another leered in her face. The blood dashed into her cheeks as she realized her position. She felt common, degraded. She felt that this day and night had robbed her of her delicacy. She wanted to run, and just then a quiet, manly voice said beside her, "Do not be



afraid. I will walk with you till you are out of the crowd."

She glanced gratefully up at him. Her pulses had bounded excitedly at his unexpected voice, and then subsided restfully. She forgot the day, forgot Robert, knew only that this picturesque man of peace walked beside her under the autumn moon.

They spoke only fitfully until they came out of the noise and hilarity. Then she said, "Have you not been well, Mr. Trent?"

"I?" he asked in surprise. "I am in perfect health. Why do you ask that?"

"You look as though you were tired — or troubled — and somewhat thinner, I think." She flushed warmly over her own shy solicitude under his glance; she could not tell him that the beauty of his face had assumed a painful spirituality in her eyes.

"I think it is yourself that is not well," he returned slowly, his swift glance travelling over her face, which still bore faint traces of tears.

"Perhaps," she said. "I — I have not been very happy to-night, and sometimes we color everything in sight with our violet mood. There! I have used that intrusive word 'mood' again. Your brother objects so emphatically to it."

"Antony? He has no use for it. He is a strong, independent man. But you —"

"I am a woman. But you — do you not acknowledge its subtlety? Do you not think it is often Fate's most powerful agent?"

"Ah, yes!" he answered, the words coming almost



like a cry. Then, after a moment, "But I am no authority."

"Why are you not an authority? Why not so much one as your brother?"

"Because — have you never heard people say that I am not a man?" He was looking deep into her eyes with a quiet smile of questioning.

"Why are you not a man?" she demanded quickly, almost roughly; and then she added, playfully, "Because you are a — god?"

He paled under her banter. "That is a merry bull," he returned. "No, I am not a man they say, because I am a dreamer."

"It takes all sorts to make a world," she protested, lapsing into her old swiftness of speech. "We cannot do without our dreamers. What sort of a machine-shop would this be without its poets and dreamers and idealists? We need a few who can think a little higher than their heads. We cannot do without you and your sort."

"That is a woman's notion."

"Why are you so sad to-night?"

"I am not sad."

"But you seem to have no care for, no part in, the Joy of Life."

"The Joy of Life? What is that?"

"It is — I do not know. I have not found it yet. What I have found has generally proven — a mess of pottage."

"And yet, I think there must be some such thing. Yes, there must be some such thing." He passed



his hand across his brow. "I have sometimes thought — Some day I will tell you what I have thought."

"Some day is no day."

"Why are you so sad to-night?"

"I am not sad. I am — I have only been feeling very lonely. Do you never feel that way?"

"Only when in a crowd."

She did not ask him to explain. She could have put out her hand and touched his in understanding. They seemed walking together in a world apart, where speech was not of voice.

When they reached the gate and she stood within, she said, as though continuing, "Sometimes I am lonely under the moon, but never under the stars."

"Nor by the thundering sea."

"Nor when I hear great music, or —"

"When the twilight comes."

They looked away from each other, and as he made no further rejoinder, "Good-night," she said, reaching her hand to him over the gate.

He turned with a start, made a movement, and folded his arms close. His face had grown still and gray. "Good-night," he said lifelessly, and he raised his hat.

The passionate blood rushed to her face. "Mr. Trent," she said, "why do you do that? Why will you not take my hand?"

"Because I am not — because I do not choose to," he responded huskily.



“ You make me feel very small. Don’t you think me worthy of taking your hand ? ”

“ Barbara ! ”

Her heart stood still ; but before she could draw breath, he had turned abruptly and left her.

Under the moon, Barbara laughed softly, tremulously, to herself.



## CHAPTER IX.

SHE was not afraid of him now as he turned his surly white face toward her at her call. He was sober.

"I should like to speak to you for a few minutes, Robert," she said. "Will you come into the library?"

He followed her in silence and stood waiting in unconcealed impatience, for her to speak.

"I have a message for you," she said, standing tall and unbending before him. "It is from Anna Laurie and —"

"Aw.—rot! Don't sing that song again," he interrupted brutally. "Save your sentimentality for yourself. Is that all you wanted?"

"The girl is dying," she went on in pale imperturbability, "and I must deliver the message, whether you care to receive it or not. But for the sake of the sender, and taking into account your present condition, I think I shall first say a few words for myself. You were drunk last night."

"So?"

"You were beastly, brutishly drunk. You came to me under the peach-tree and said disgusting, indecent things to me. Then you fell into the pig-sty."

"You are quite dramatically realistic," he said



with forced nonchalance, a swarthy color dyeing his flabby cheek. "I beg pardon for the indecency. It is impossible and useless for me to say it will never happen again."

Her slender hand shook as it rested upon the table. "No," she returned quietly, "do not say it. It would be useless. But — I am going away."

"Eh?" He turned more fully toward her, opening his dull eyes uncomprehendingly.

"I cannot live with you, Robert. You evidently do not care whether I am happy or not, and as I can do nothing for you, I prefer being by myself."

"By the way," he broke in, as though not hearing her, "how did I get out — of the pig-sty?"

"I lifted you out."

His face turned a darker red. He looked at the tall, strong-limbed girl with dull shame. "You should have left me there," he laughed shortly.

"Yes."

"And so you want to throw up the situation, eh?" he went on with another mirthless laugh.

"I don't want to, Robert," she disclaimed in swift passion. "I don't want to go away and be alone and leave you alone. I want to stay with you more than I can explain. But you have forced me to it. Robert, last night you struck me."

His hand went out as though to ward off a blow; his face put on a deathly, sea-green hue.

"You struck me," she pursued relentlessly, "with the appurtenance of a gentleman, — with a *repoussée* silver-backed brush."



He stared at her with dazed eyes. "It's a lie," he groaned miserably.

"No, it is true. See — the ridges have left a purple gash upon my temple."

"It's a lie," he repeated foolishly, his eyes fastened upon the spot.

"No, it is no lie, Robert. And so I am going away."

He turned uncertainly toward the door, but again she detained him.

"Wait a moment," she said. "I have not delivered my message yet. Anna Laurie wants to see you to-night; she wants you to sing some of the old songs to her. I know you will go, because — well, because she has only a few days more to live, and you are not quite as brutal as you seem. Good-bye, Robert." She held out her hand.

He caught at her dress. "Don't go," he muttered hoarsely. "Don't go, Barbara. Give the beast another chance. Can't you forgive and forget?"

"Yes. But I am weary of doing the forgiving, while you go on doing the forgetting without let or regret. But you are going to Anna's, Robert?" She drew her gown firmly from his fingers.

"Barbara," he said in uncontrolled passion, shaking the door as though he would have shaken her from her firm moorings, "if you go away with that mark on your face, you will drive me to hell. By heavens! I never struck a living thing before. The sight of blood, of pain, sickens me. You know I did not mean to hurt you, Barbara."



"I know," she said sadly. "*You* did not do it, but I am not going to chance its recurrence. I am not a patient, martyr-natured woman. I shall never offer a sop to your instability by accepting it with resignation. I owe myself something more than that."

He turned despairingly from her and threw himself face downward on the couch, his hands clasped in a vice over his head.

She hesitated. For all her stern hardness, her face was pale and drawn with pain. She drew nearer to him. "Will you go to Anna's, Robert?" she reiterated steadily. He did not answer. She heard a dull moan, and she put her hand on his shoulder, leaning her face closer. "If you will go to Anna, I will stay till to-morrow."

He pressed his face deeper into the cushions, and so, knowing when to desist, she left him.

She did not see him again until the next morning, when, for the first time since her coming, they breakfasted together. He was quite pale, and his eyes were darkly encircled; he spoke in a hoarse, quiet voice. It seemed to Barbara that, despite his silence, his bearing had acquired for the hour an unaccustomed dignity.

They were just rising when Mrs. Black brought in a note on a salver, which she passed to her young mistress.

"It is from Mrs. Laurie," Barbara hurriedly announced, glancing at the address and tearing open the envelope.



DEAR BARBARA, — [she read] Anna passed away last night. It must have happened while Robert was singing. We thought she was asleep. And so she was. There is a smile upon her face.

MARCIA LAURIE.

Barbara sat moveless a moment, quieting her emotion.

When she turned to Robert she saw that he stood at the window, looking out, his back to the room. She arose presently and handed him the paper without speaking. She stood with her hand upon his shoulder while he read.

For many minutes they stood thus, and then he put his hand up to hers and pressed it. "Thank you," he said in discordant hesitancy. Barbara felt a closer kinship for her brother in the gentle pause which followed than she had ever before felt for him. "I think I am going away for a few days," he said afterwards in a quick, nervous manner. "I must get out of the town. Will you stay till I return?"

"Here? In the house? You forget Mr. Trent, Robert."

"I can tell Trent. He will take a room in town for that time."

"No, don't say anything. I shall go down and stay with Helen Greathouse. I have often promised her."

"Very well. Then I will say good-bye."

"Wait till I put on my things. You can walk with me up to Lauries'?"

It was California's Admission Day, and the little



town wore a quiet holiday aspect. As they walked up the pretty avenue, lined on either side with stately poplars whose silver was turning to russet and gold, she remembered Antony Trent's words, "She will drop off with the falling leaves," and wondered over the proving of the prophecy.

Robert said good-bye to her at the gate. "I cannot go in," he said. "I—I shall write to Mrs. Laurie, and — er — will you see that a net-work of valley-lilies — you understand — is sent to envelope the — That is all, I think. Take care of yourself, and —" He wrung her hand hard.

This bringing forth and putting away of souls; this moiling, and toiling, and bringing of axes that never are ground; this loving and losing, this hoping and despairing; this divine cheat and its ugly brother fact; this sorry, necessary business called Life, in which man is so earnestly engaged, — whither tends it? What means it? Is it worth while? — Who can say? For the day dies with its rags and tags of unfinished work, unfinished hopes, unfinished crimes, unfinished glories; but eternity, which knows nor birth nor death, nor rest nor ceasing, winds on, unmindful of our littleness, yet forgetting naught.

Toward evening, as Barbara, after her quiet ministering, came out of the grief-stricken house and took her way down the avenue, the evidences of alien, indifferent, self-engrossed life harked strangely back to her. Men were walking briskly, children were playing merrily, women were driving or saun-



tering by on social affairs intent. This was health, she thought, this outer activity which defies the inner brooding.

She drew long breaths of the soft, warm air; she set herself to forgetting the sorrow of the day, — she did not believe in sitting down on a dunghill and giving herself up to sadness. The health of the world demands another face. Besides, in her inmost heart, in her intimate self's heart, she was not sad. The lovely lily-girl had passed, but Barbara believed that, in her strange, sweet passing, she had called to a reckless man a compelling "Halt!" This little beating hope, and another dim, remote glory within her, painted her cheek and lip in the soft rose flush of well-being.

As she walked down the quiet main business street, she saw Antony Trent hurrying up the cross-road, and, to her pleasure, he perceived her, raised his hat, and came toward her.

"You seem to be in a hurry," she observed as they continued along together.

"I am. I have just received an important telegram concerning a tremendous wheat deal, and must consult with Mr. Greathouse. Are you on your way there?"

"Yes. What a fortunate thing it is to be a busy man. I wish I were one."

"A selfish wish."

"Don't," she begged. "Compliments are not at all becoming to you."

"Why not?"



"Oh, because they are not your *métier* — I can't find the English word."

"What is my *métier*?"

"Well, wheat deals and such things — making money. Is n't it?" She stole an arch smile at him, and was surprised to see him frown. "There!" she added quickly, "I was impertinent."

"No, you were quite correct. Well, do you think making money a despicable profession?"

"I think it is the best thing a man can make, except, on occasion, one other thing."

"And what is that?" he asked, with keen interest.

She gave a half-smile of mischief. "Making love," she returned.

He laughed, somewhat awkwardly. "Rather cloying for an occupation," he remarked.

"I said, 'on occasion.'"

"Ah, a sort of interlude."

"Or, at least, a finale."

She spoke at random, and Trent colored with anger over the conscious start within him. However —

"I will take that under advisement," he said with a faint touch of sarcasm, as they turned the corner.

"I was only 'drolling,' as Howells says," she affirmed, with a sudden change of tone. "It was the reaction of the day's events. I have just come from the Lauries. You know it is all over for Anna?"

"No!" he murmured. Then, thoughtfully, "It does seem a pity," he added, "for a girl who loved life as she did, — especially one in her worldly position."



“More so than for one less favored of fortune?”

“Without doubt.”

“Perhaps you are right.”

Coming up the walk, they heard voices from the veranda; and when they reached the steps they saw Greathouse, Cyril Trent, and Helen, sitting there in cosy converse.

Trent, after a quick greeting and a few low words to Greathouse, withdrew with him to the other end of the porch. Cyril had risen at their approach, and, upon Barbara's taking his proffered chair, seated himself on the veranda railing.

She noticed, with swift concern, that he looked pale and ill, although he spoke in his usual cheery voice. They had just had tea, and Cyril still held his cup in his hand.

“That was excellent, Miss Greathouse,” he said, while Helen unpinned Barbara's hat. “Some Monday afternoon you — and Miss Gerrish — must come up to my cabin, and I will brew you some in return. I cannot promise you so royally dainty a cup, but the tea will be good. Will you come?”

“It sounds delightful — just like a lark. I shall love to come, if Barbara will chaperon me.”

“Oh, it would be quite regular,” smiled Cyril. “Monday afternoon from five to six is my lecture-day, and any one comes, you know. To-day is an off day. Well, then, Miss Gerrish, shall we say a week from to-day?”

“It will be charming, as Helen says,” she answered lightly.



"Thank you. You will supply all the charm, and I the tea. Annie Laurie and her mother have often 'tea-d' with me in that way."

"Anna — you have heard, of course?" she said simply, looking more directly toward him.

"No."

She told them of the girl's peaceful ending, and a few minutes later Cyril arose and took leave.

"One second, Mr. Trent," interposed Helen with unusual gentleness, "I want to give you some of these violets. Do you know you are not looking well? So here is a donation from the Flower Mission. Let me put them in your button-hole." She drew the purple mass of fragrance from her belt, and approached him with pretty grace.

"Don't rob yourself," protested Cyril. "Well, if you will. But give them to me in my hand. They are exquisite." He inhaled the perfume lingeringly. "Our florists have achieved another marvel in this great, strong California violet. Don't you think so, Miss Gerrish? I shall put them in a certain long, blue 'stork' vase I have in my mind's eye — I picked it up long ago in Chinatown — and we shall be artistic."

"Not well, Cyril?" questioned Greathouse as he came toward them and held out his hand. "I noticed a slight change in you myself."

"Oh, it is nothing — a little malaria perhaps. Good-night, Antony; good-night, all."

He went down the steps, holding his hat in his hand, and their glance followed him in sudden



silence. He was nearing the gate, when Antony rose abruptly and walked to the head of the steps.

"Cyril!" he called, sharply.

They saw him turn in the distance. "Did you call, Antony?" he sang back.

"Yes. Just wait a minute." And Cyril stood until Antony came up to him.

"Why don't you put on your hat?" demanded the older man, shortly.

"I had forgotten," returned Cyril, placing it now on his head.

"You are too careless. It is stupid to be careless of one's health. Have you taken any quinine — for your malaria?"

"I have no malaria, Antony."

"I thought you just said — Then what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"But you have the appearance of illness. Why don't you consult a physician?"

"There is no necessity."

The low-spoken, heart-sick tone touched him curiously.

"Better so, young-un," he said reassuringly, touching his shoulder. "All is well, — as well as it can be with you, I am sure. You seem to have filled out your life according to your tastes, and it is better so — for both of us."

"All right, Antony. You know best, of course. Good-night."



“Good-night, Cy. Keep your hat on in the night air.”

He stood at the gate a moment, watching the tall, easy figure swinging up the street under the declining sun. Then he shot the bolt again upon the past, and went back to his absorbing consultation with Adam Greathouse.



## CHAPTER X.

RIVERTON records detail no events of the following week. Riverton records, like most township records, are singularly sparse of interest. They give the outlines, — the births, marriages, divorces, crimes, fames, deaths of their residents, — and leave it to the story-writers and story-tellers to fill out and in. But Riverton's recorder showed no dereliction of duty in leaving that week's page untouched. Nothing did happen. Therefore, according to the philosopher, it was a happy week.

There is a story of a mystic, silent diligence which, in the olden days, passed from post to post, dropping its passengers and picking them up, coming and going, appearing and disappearing, making no dust, or trail, or sound, except at the moment of arrival and departure, when was heard a warning tally-ho. "The diligence has come," the people would say; and again, "The diligence has gone," they said. But no one was ever known to have met the diligence on the road, and of those who traveled therein, not one was ever known to speak of or describe the road over which he had traveled. Yet, that no miracle or magic had been performed to bring them hither thence, that they must have journeyed over the



accustomed road, needed no further evidence than the state of the tired horses and the prescribed amount of time consumed in going from goal to goal. But, "The diligence has come," said the wondering people, when the tally-ho sounded. "We did not see it coming." And again, "The diligence has gone," they said.

To the actors in this quiet little tale, the week and its doings were as vague, except for Antony Trent, who from his end of the wire helped to manipulate the great, historical wheat deal, and in his leisure moments, with all the delicacy and tact which the venture demanded, worked his great matrimonial scheme.

But Greathouse could see no move, and Greathouse was growing impatient. "The man understood me,—there is no question about that," he growled to himself; and, with his usual profanity, lashing himself to a fury, "damned if I can make out what he's waiting for, if he cares a cent to clinch the offer. He has n't changed or added to his attentions since I spoke, so far as I can see. If he has any intentions he is making a *détour* to get at the object of them,—and I have n't time for *détours*." But he saw no means of finding out.

The trouble with Greathouse was that he did not know that Antony Trent had begun his intentions a year before Helen's home-coming, and his attentions on the day of her arrival. True, the latter were of so fine a nature that only the donor and recipient could perceive their existence except in a



broad way, such, for instance, as was summarized by the rumor that Antony Trent was markedly attentive to his chief's daughter. But as Antony Trent had never before taken especial note of any young woman, the rumor was held by the more charitable, in view of his tactful measures, to be merely a gossip-hawker's budget. This was precisely the view that Trent hoped to establish. It would have been as impossible for him to manœuvre his design according to the open tactics of the American-heiress-seeking nobility across the water, as it would be for an oyster to live outside his shell. He had a fine sense of the fitness of things, and believed in keeping that covered which should remain covered. If he was planning an ignoble game, he played it in a gentlemanly fashion.

To discover her favorite flower and send her a few now and then ; to ride with her to the one or two historical points of interest, or over the noted picturesque drives of the country ; to send her tickets for the oratorio "because he knew she enjoyed music ;" to walk with her through the County Fair, or through the flour and paper mills in the character of friendly guide and cicerone ; to help her with her wrap ; to offer his arm or assistance when such support was unlooked for, yet desirable ; to notice her varying moods and attire, their becomingness or the contrary,—these and their like were some of the methods, noticed and unnoticed, which Antony Trent had employed to bait and entrap his unconscious young prey. And Helen Greathouse's girlish vanity had



been piqued and delighted by the notice and the delicacy of kindness which this grave, clever, much sought-after man of affairs showed her father's daughter. Therefore it was that her little daub at match-making remained, for the time, a mere daub.

Barbara Gerrish, during that week's visit, saw no foundation for the rumor which had reached her ears a few days before. She saw more of Antony Trent in those five or six days than she had seen of him in the same number of months during which she had lived in the same house with him. This was an excitingly busy time for the Adam Greathouse Company, and it was necessary for the secretary to be often in consultation with the president. To her observation, he displayed only an amused, kindly interest in the pretty, lonely child of his widowed chief. "People must talk," she decided with a shrug; and when Antony Trent turned to her, Barbara, for an answer to a discussion, for a judgment upon a book or a character, for an appreciative word upon a bit of scenery — for he, and Helen, and herself took several early morning rides across country together during her stay — she replied happily, and in friendly way, a feat she could not have achieved had he seemed the mere fortune-hunter which gossip dubbed him.

She saw much of Antony, but nothing at all of Cyril Trent. "I shall see him Monday," she said to herself, and she was satisfied to live upon that promise. It was curious, however, that she did not run across him in her walks through town, or in her daily



visits to Mrs. Laurie. But when, on Friday, Greathouse himself remarked that he had not seen Cyril Trent for four days, an unusual neglect for Cyril, she wondered, with a hot flush, whether he was staying away because she was there, and again she wondered whether he was ill; but she found it impossible to ask.

Although she did not hear from Robert, she kept up an indomitable hope for him which was strengthened by her confidential talks with Mrs. Laurie. The latter was, with Barbara's help, planning a monument to the memory of her lost child, and their combined thought and consideration had finally resolved upon a Training-School for Nurses, to be built as an annex to the Refuge Club, the foundation and walls of which were already standing. Barbara took a deep interest in the plans.

"I am not sure," she told the Greathouses Saturday night, as she and Helen sat near the bedside of the old man, who had succumbed to an attack of bronchitis, "I am not sure that I shall not go in for the training myself. With my knowledge of hygiene and anatomy, I should have a good beginning, and I often feel I should be very much at home in a sick-room."

"You are," Greathouse assured her. "I know no one who can shake pillows up to that peculiar, much-to-be desired downiness that you can. Now there's Nell — she gives it a thump and a dump and says, 'How is that, Dad?' and when she gives that persuasive ain't-I-a-great-help look, what can I say but yes?"



Helen pouted, and Barbara laughed. "Wait till she has had more experience," she advised. "After all the years of shaking I had with grandmamma's cushions and pillows it would be ridiculous if I were not adept now. But I really think I should make a capital nurse, especially with the little ones."

"If you ever go and do anything so uncalled-for and pose-y as that, I'll disown you," Helen announced from her seat on the rug by the window.

"Pose-y?" repeated Barbara, opening her eyes wide. "What is that?"

"Oh, going in for a uniform, and unworldliness, and sweet saintliness, and all that! Leave it to the others!"

"Which others?"

"The disappointed and the unfortunate and — that sort."

"You would have a cheery lot of nurses at that rate. I am ashamed of you, Helen."

"All right — as long as you don't make me ashamed of you. Here comes a messenger-boy."

Greathouse's rooms were on the ground floor, and as she spoke, Helen sprang to her feet, and slightly raising the window, called to the boy as he came up the steps.

"For whom is it?" she asked, holding out her hand.

"Miss Barbara Gerrish," replied the boy, and he gave her the envelope.

While the boy waited in event of an answer, Barbara was quickly reading:

Will be home Sunday on midnight train. Be at house to receive me.

ROBERT.



"Anything wrong, Barb?" murmured Helen, as the girl looked up at her with a dazed, white face.

"Oh, no," she laughed in some excitement, "but I believe I was frightened for a moment. Robert is coming home to-morrow night, so I shall have to leave you. There is no answer, my boy," she added, drawing nearer to the waiting Mercury, and he went nonchalantly off.

"We shall miss you immeasurably," grumbled Greathouse, looking with frank admiration at her vivid face as she leaned upon the foot of the bed.

"Will you? It has been a great treat for me." She gazed musingly about the bright, comfortable room filled with the luxuries of wealth and the spirit of family ease and restfulness.

"It has been a treat to us," Greathouse asserted heartily. "Break away from that brother of yours once in a while and treat us again."

Barbara smiled as if still dreaming. "Thank you," she returned absently. Then she shook off her abstraction, and came around and held out her hand to him. "I have several little things to do to-night before going to bed, so I will leave you. If I don't see you before I leave in the morning, good-morning and good-bye. 'Night, girlie," she called to the girl still crouched on the floor near the window.

"Good-night, Barbara," answered Helen, without moving, and Barbara went off.

"A charming woman, your friend," observed



Greathouse, a few minutes after the door had closed behind her. In his hope and assurance that Helen now represented more irresistible attractions to his beloved lieutenant than any other woman on the horizon possibly could, he had been able to view her quondam imagined rival with unprejudiced eyes. "She gives one a sense of trust, of reliability."

"Are you thinking of giving me a step-mamma?" queried the girl on the floor, with averted face.

"Halloa! There's an idea. Or is my little girl cross?"

His little girl did not answer. She sat with her arms clasped about her limbs; her curly head had drooped till it rested upon her knees. All day she had felt something rankling. The feeling had grown apace during the week, and she had striven valiantly to annihilate it. She knew it was petty, contemptible, and she was ashamed to acknowledge, even to herself, that its name was jealousy, but a little incident of the morning had shown it in its true colors. Of course, she knew that a glowing light cannot be hid beneath a bushel, and if Antony Trent acknowledged in his manner that Barbara's was an arrestive individuality, he was simply indorsing a self-evident truth; but to the spoilt child of fortune to whom he had been paying a flattering attention, the fact was borne in upon her that this latter attention was not so intent as that he gave the older girl, and the knowledge was not palatable. It was the first tinge of gray upon her rose cloud, and Helen did not enjoy her first taste of the vapors.



That morning's little passage of light had disgruntled her sadly. They — she, and Barbara, and Trent — had taken an early gallop over the hills, and were approaching an opening in the woods, when Helen exclaimed, "Oh, there is Cyril Trent's pretty cabin! Shall we pay him a morning call?" There was a moment's drawing up, but in a flash, Barbara, touching her horse lightly with her whip, was seen galloping at a pretty speed down the hill-side. In a half-second Trent had followed her, but before he had gone a dozen yards he drew rein and turned about.

"Coming, Miss Greathouse?" he called.

"Why don't you overtake Barbara?"

"Impossible. Besides, my horse and I prefer the foot-pace with you." He had been in delightful humor after that, but Helen resented his impulsive forgetfulness of her.

How long she sat on the floor, pouting gloomily over the slight, she did not know. It was only when, in the course of her dissatisfied brooding, she remembered her father's warm words of praise, which, to her clouded vision, had seemed another disparagement of herself, that she realized where she was, and raised her head. Feeling somewhat stiff, she scrambled to her feet and looked toward him. He was fast asleep, and something in his aspect told her that he had been so for some time. She moved softly to the chandelier, turned off the gas, and after lighting the lamp and adjusting the shade, stepped quietly away.



She proceeded upstairs to her room and began to undress. She had shaken her hair loose from its pins and was fastening her dainty night-dress, when, seized by a sudden impulse, she picked up the small Sèvres lamp from her dressing-table, and her little bare feet sped swiftly over the carpet to the door dividing her room from that of her guest.

She opened the door and passed through. The lamp she held made the only spot of light in the quiet room as she moved toward the bed and looked down.

Barbara lay peacefully sleeping. Her dark hair, loosely braided for the night, fell soft about her temples. Her dusky face was slightly flushed; her fine, mobile lips kissed each other lightly; her dark, slightly curled lashes cast a faint shadow on her cheeks; she breathed almost imperceptibly, her bosom rising faintly and regularly. There was a largeness and grace in her posture and figure, in the rounded arm and slender hand flung over her head, which Helen recognized, and which, in her unconscious comparison, made her feel slight and insignificant. Even in sleep she appeared to Helen to represent character and magnetism, and her hungry eyes rested long upon her. But as she stood, so close that the lamp cast a halo on the pillow, Barbara slowly opened her eyes and gazed up at her.

She smiled sleepily. "Well, Psyche," she said in a drowsy tone, "what is it?"

"I wanted to look at you," returned the girl, dauntlessly, with burning cheeks. "I wanted to discover wherein your fascination really lies."



"And did you?" queried the other, in amusement, while her ghostly visitor put down her lamp and settled herself Turkish fashion at the foot of the bed.

"Yes and no. It is past finding out, I suppose," she responded flippantly; "but it is there just the same."

"What do you mean by my fascination, Nellie?"

"Oh, your power to make others think that you are the only one in a roomful of people."

"Do I ever make you feel that way?"

"No, but I am a girl. Do you know, Barbara, I sometimes think we merely rich girls, who think ourselves the salt and pivot of the world, are only its ornaments, or excrescences, and don't amount to much, after all?"

"The proud flesh of the world," murmured Barbara, below her breath.

"What?"

"Nothing, dear; a passing thought."

"The other day, last week, when Cyril Trent was speaking to papa, he said, 'Merely to be born rich is not to be born at all,—it is to be still-born.' I believe he was quoting, but it sounded awfully socialistic. Still, I suppose half the time it is true. It must develop character to be forced out into the world, to come in conflict with humanity, to know that your life depends entirely upon your own strength and abilities. It must give a girl—a woman—a sense of satisfaction."

"Especially," drawled Barbara, a cynical light in



her eyes, "when she has to be up and out in all weathers whether she will or no, or when she has a pain in her head or any other ache or ill, or when a glorious opera-troupe appears and she can't take it in, or when all the other lovely things of life go by and she isn't in them. Oh, I tell you, Helen, poverty, or even gentility, is very piquant for an experiment, but for a permanent state, give me downright, all-powerful riches."

"I was not speaking of riches as a means, but as an effect on character."

"Pshaw! Character! Give me what I want and I'll be 'as good as gold.' Who has a better character than my Lord Multi-millionnaire?"

"You don't understand me, or — won't you?"

"Child, I am so sleepy that I can't. And you — you will catch your death of cold mooning at me there in that thin night-dress. Here, midget, come into my arms and I'll warm you."

The girl snuggled down against her, and put her arms about her neck. "I know what part of it is, Barb," she whispered finally. "It is the protective, the maternal spirit you seem to breathe."

"Exactly. I'm a kind, motherly old soul; is that it? Hush, childie, let us go to sleep."

Five minutes later they were both calmly sleeping, and while they slept, the diligence was slowly winding to the goal. But they did not hear it coming, — it gave no warning tally-ho.



## CHAPTER XI.

IT was half-past ten the next morning when Barbara turned out of the Greathouse gate and took her way down the street in the midsummer's languorous heat. The Sabbath quiet was abroad, and the few men she met in this business portion of the town wore that leisurely, lost aspect which sits upon so many Americans on the street of a Sunday.

She was approaching the Common, when she perceived Judge and Mrs. Laurie, and their son Powell with his ungainly 'cello, sauntering slowly toward her.

"Have n't you lost yourselves?" she questioned as they came up, and she gave her hand to the Judge, her eyes to Mrs. Laurie.

"No, we are going to the Sunday Morning Club," replied Mrs. Laurie for her rather silent husband, who looked away from them.

"I suppose that accounts for Mr. Laurie's bulky burden," she said, eyeing the young man's green cloth-covered instrument.

"Yes. I generally accompany David Simms when he plays, and Cyril Trent is going to speak to-day. That is why father and mother are going. Do come with us, Miss Gerrish. Cyril generally has something to say that is worth listening to."



"I wish you would come, Barbara," supplemented his mother's sad, soft voice.

"Ah— I had not thought of it —" hesitated the girl, the rich color dyeing her cheek. "Besides, I do not belong—I have no ticket—no card of admission."

"My invitation is enough," said young Laurie. "You don't need a card—any one comes who cares to."

"Better come, Miss Gerrish," vouchsafed the judge, and Barbara turned and walked back with them. She felt a little flutter of excitement as they went up the stone steps of the Painters' club-house, in whose large exhibition room the Sunday Morning Club held its meetings.

As they passed up the few steps, Antony Trent, walking past, caught sight of them. The fact that Cyril was to speak was known to him through General Grosvenor, whom he had met that morning in the barber-shop. The sight of Barbara Gerrish going up the club-house steps brought a cynical smile to his lips. He walked on briskly. By the time he reached the corner the smile had frozen into a frown. Because a woman and a fool had got religion must he be troubled by their vagary? Bosh!

Another minute, however, and he had turned and was walking toward the meeting-place. He would hear for once what the lad had to say, he told himself; and with an indulgent smile, he walked through the vestibule, baring his smooth, dark head as he entered the hall.



As the door swung to behind him, he was surprised to find the cosy place already filled. Every seat was occupied, and several late-comers stood with him at the back of the hall. There was a buzz of conversation; and as Antony bowed to an acquaintance, his gaze traveled down the aisles and across the sea of faces until it rested on the distinctive features of Barbara Gerrish where she sat with the Lauries. Their seats had evidently been reserved, for they occupied chairs near the platform. She wore a small, dark hat with a red rose in it which rested on her hair; her gown was black, of the tailor-made order, and suited her figure and pose perfectly. Trent found her appearance eminently satisfactory.

Having placed her, his eyes passed from group to group, recognizing here "the quality" of Riverton, there in turn, a farmer, a workman, an ambitious youth, a well-groomed club-man, an artist, and so on, up and down the scale of fortune.

Presently the tuning of strings was heard, and, directing his gaze toward the platform, he saw that David Simms and Powell Laurie had taken their seats to one side and somewhat toward the back of the stage. Otherwise, except for a small reading-table near the front and center, the platform was vacant.

After a few minutes of preparatory tuning, the dreamy, opening strains of Grieg's "Dawn" were heard, and the buzz of conversation ceased. When Antony looked upon the stage again, he saw that his brother Cyril had taken his place beside the reader's desk. As he looked at him, thus removed, distinct



from his fellows, a slow, curious sense of unfamiliarity crept into the older man's consciousness, and sent a flush into his thin dark face.

The "young-un" stood in easy unconsciousness, his hand resting on the lectern. He was dressed in scrupulously neat gray tweed ; his spotless linen and polished shoes, the loosely-knotted black tie, his somewhat long golden hair brushed carelessly back, were, if unconventional for the place and hour, the attire of a gentleman. His perfect physique told powerfully as he stood gazing straight before him ; added to which, the pallor of the still countenance, the ideality of the dreaming brow and eyes, the faint tenderness of the beardless, boyish lips and chin, made him an unusual embodiment of manly beauty and interest.

"The lad is handsome," said Antony to himself, with a feeling half of wonder, half of disturbance in the kinship ; and then, as the music, of which Trent had heard nothing, died away, Cyril began to speak.

"We come here," began the pleasant, musical voice, "in the character of questioners. If the essence of life, the intelligence of the soul, were convertible into form, we should find it taking the shape of a huge interrogation mark — What is life? What is death? What is Truth? What is God? Is there immortality? These and their kindred are the eternal problems which man, according to his time, necessity, and desires, has striven to answer satisfactorily unto man."

Antony smiled. Would this young idealist, this



visionary who, in his lowliest flight, was scarcely cognizant of the stern, ugly reality of life, presume to add his subscription to the mass of dreams and speculations with which the brain of the world was already clogged to suffocation? He listened with skeptical curiosity.

The man spoke quietly. He prefaced his remarks with the hypothesis that our most obstinate convictions were the outgrowth of tradition, that a clear, naked vision was a human impossibility. All ideas upon the Unknowable, First Cause, God, were built upon speculation, which, in turn, had been built upon speculation, and so on, backward and forward, through infinity. In every age, he maintained, some gigantic Dream-Soul had voiced the trend of thought and aspiration of his time into a systematized creed, and formed a religion. But the mutability of circumstance, the advance of the suns, and the consequent changes in human thought, had proven that every established creed was but a step to the next, and so on to the highest, which reaches into the beyond. From which he drew the conclusion that history never has produced and never will produce a Final Religion.

Trent found himself attending closely. He was unprepared for this downright logic, this reasoning from fact and not from fancy. The exposition of these ideas found him respectful; they were coincident with his own. He was surprised into the peculiar acknowledgment that he no longer knew his brother; that within the past twelve years they had drifted out



of each other's knowledge ; that the incident of one night had laid its chilling hand between them, and made them, in all save a common parentage and childhood, distant and unacquainted as strangers. That the boy had matured and given his dreams a more substantial foundation, should not have surprised him. In the matter of experience, Antony Trent stood a child before his younger brother.

His attention had wandered. He strove to concentrate it anew ; but the sound of the man's grave voice was mingled with the memory of the boy's treble, and, strive as he would, he could not overcome this sudden submission to the spell of the past. It was a novel weakness, and Trent fought against it.

He knew that the young-un was speaking in a broad, tolerant strain ; he heard the words, " Greater than you have thought and will think otherwise. Everything is at some time true to some one — Nothing is true forever to every one — " And then he lost him again, — lost him to float in a sea of egoistic questionings which found no answer, meant nothing to him until he became conscious that his gaze was resting on the red rose in Barbara Gerrish's hat, and noticed that the girl sat in an intensely still attitude of attention. His glance turned slowly from her to the man who thus held her, and now he saw that the former quiet pose of philosophy he had borne had been strained, artificial, necessitous ; that he had burst the bounds of convention, and was speaking his chosen thoughts in their more intimate, impetuous language.



He scorned the epigram that Truth is hidden in the bottom of a well or lodged in the crevice of a high mountain peak. He averred that it lay about us, above us, within us. "Truth?" he said. "There is but one eternal Truth: Nature is, and the Ideal beckons."

He was fairly launched now. His face put on a radiance which seemed to spiritualize it. This Truth, this Nature, was his God, — his blind, deaf God, working without end or design, working of necessity, sometimes wrecking, sometimes slaying, sometimes glorifying, but — blind. Thence the excuse, the resignation, and the awe.

"This is pantheism pure and simple," smiled Antony, more at ease in this recognition of his boy-brother who spoke now through the man.

"And this I would have you know," spoke the dreamer. "Man is but the apogee of Nature, Nature's darling, her highest work, but — no more. Little souls, what ask you? Do you know? Men are not born equals, nor do they develop equals, — interdependence and division is the law of man to man. Of your superfluity you shall give, — of your strength, your divinity, your joy, your riches, — and each in his little way, each in his little way, shall draw a mortal up. So climbs the world. Go, measure your success by this: inasmuch as you have loved and have been loved, you have lived — this alone is life, its compensation, and its immortality.

"I saw a fleece-white cloud go sailing like a lily wraith over the sky, — sailing away into the infinite



blue. I watched the glory of the sunset, transfiguring the world, — and fading into gray. I saw a woman turn with a wondrous smile of love upon her fallen sister, — and pass away. I saw — what have I not seen of earth's immortalities !”

And the dream-man stood before them. And afterwards, while his lips yet trembled with unspoken words, David Simms picked up his bow and drew it lovingly across the strings, and a rush of lilting, mounting melody like a hallelujah of birds swept into the listening silence, and Cyril Trent stood gazing before him until Powell Laurie arose and put his hand upon his shoulder, when he smiled. And Barbara Gerrish rose with the others, and moved out of the building into the sunlit, brooding streets, through the Common and over the bridge, and so, up the cross-street, home.

When day was waning, the three men met at the gate, Powell Laurie, Cyril and Antony Trent.

“I have a message for Miss Gerrish,” said Laurie, as they walked up the path, upon whose stone the late afternoon sun had flung the shadows of the rose-trees. “I wonder if she is at home.”

“She has been stopping with the Greathouses all the week, you know,” replied Antony, slackening his pace in answer.

“But she returned this morning. She expects Gerrish to-night.”

“Ah. I had not heard.”

They ascended the steps, glancing leisurely around



the silent premises for a sight of the lady of their search.

"The place seems deserted," said Antony. "Wait a minute — or come in — while I inquire inside." He drew out his key and was about to insert it, when his hand gave a start.

"There she is," he said, and they stood and watched her moving toward them from the grape-arbor. She had changed her dark gown for a soft, maize-colored dimity. Upon her shoulder rested a massive bunch of brown-gold muscatelle grapes; in her arms she carried heavy clusters of the purple fruit. She came toward them, the westering sun beating down on her uncovered head, transforming her into a goddess of the harvest, a bacchante.

The sun had flung a glowing rose upon her cheek and so dazzled her eyes that she did not see them till she was quite close.

"Oh, Mr. Laurie," she exclaimed, looking up and hastening toward them. "And Mr. Trent — and — you!" She stood still, three steps from the top, quite startled from her wonted calm. Antony Trent's senses gave a leap as he saw the color pulse through her dark cheek, when she looked to and from his brother.

"I am quite too laden to shake hands with you all," she went on, coming up the remaining steps. "I have been gathering grapes for Robert's supper-table to-night. He is coming home, you know. Are n't they gorgeous? I would offer you some, but I know you won't care for them; and, besides, I want



them just so for Robert. Will you open the door for me, Mr. Trent, and I shall be out again as soon as I can drop these. It is too beautiful to go in."

Trent stood aside, meeting her glowing eyes with a faint smile. He did not know that he was quite pale, nor did Barbara notice it.

"Are n't you all going to sit down?" she urged, as she came out after a moment's absence. "I have so much to talk about, — with you in particular, Mr. Trent." Unconsciously her voice went softer as she looked toward Cyril Trent, leaning against the trellis.

"We have come only for a minute," he answered courteously but shortly. "Powell has a message for you."

"It was all I could do to make him come in at all," declared Laurie. "We are on our way to 'The Painters,' where Cyril is wanted. Mother returns you your Browning. She especially wishes me to say that she enjoyed intensely the 'Muleykah' — whatever that may mean."

"I thought she would," said Barbara, taking the volume from his hand and placing it on the window-sill. "There is such a brave heart-break in it. I would not have you read it for the world, Mr. Laurie. Some day I shall give it to Mr. Trent."

"No favors," cried the young fellow good-naturedly, as they moved toward the step. "I won't stand it. If there is anything a fellow hates it is being left out in the cold in a question of understanding — from experience. A year or two more will remedy all that, Miss Gerrish."



"Don't be in a hurry to learn," she advised, in what Helen would have called her "maternal tone." They were walking down the steps now, and she moved unquestioningly with them. "It always angers me to hear young people longing for 'experience' or pretending to it. It's a robbing scheme at best, as the rose said when the bee kissed her."

"It only made her blush the rosier."

"But the next time she did not blush at all."

"You are a pessimistic, degenerate young woman."

"I only meant to warn you, young man. I am sorry you are going. It is just the hour and evening for a chat."

"I am afraid I should grow sentimental," smiled Laurie, looking at her with honest admiration.

"I should endeavor to keep you in countenance," she returned in kind; and then as Cyril, still silent, unlatched the gate, "I will see you to-morrow, Mr. Trent," she added, more quietly.

"To-morrow?" he repeated, with raised hat, stepping onto the sidewalk and regarding her questioningly.

"Why," she laughed, "you have not forgotten your invitation for tea, have you?"

"Only for the moment," he reassured her, a slow flush rising to his cheek, which in the full light appeared somewhat sallow. "The water is already boiling — in anticipation. Don't disappoint it."

"I won't," she answered with a nod; and, as they saluted and walked away, she stood for a space gazing after them.



Then she turned, and in deep, unconscious musing trailed over the grass of the lawn, picking a rose here, a sprig of jasmine there, a spicy carnation beyond. Just in the center plot stood an immense old rose-tree laden with exquisite Sunset roses. High up among its topmost spoils nodded a radiant beauty, and as she reached toward it a man's voice said suddenly in the evening quiet, —

“Must it be the highest?”

“‘One needs must love the highest, when one sees,’” she responded without turning, reaching ineffectually. “But I can't break it off.”

His hand reached over hers, caught the rose-stem and her fingers in a vice, and drew them down.

She made to draw her hand away, but he held it so tight that a cry of pain almost escaped her. She looked up, startled, into Antony Trent's ashen face.

For a moment his eyes burned into hers. Then, “Barbara,” he said, in a strange, suffocated voice, “I —”

“Oh, no!” she cried, recoiling as far as her imprisoned hand would allow. “Oh, no, Mr. Trent.”

“Be still!” he commanded, in savage roughness. “Be still. I will not have you answer me. I love you! I will have you! You shall be, must be, mine. Don't answer — not now. To-morrow. Ask Robert. My God, Barbara, how I love you!” He flung her hand almost brutally from him, turned uncertainly, and passed out of the gate.

The Sunday bells rang out peacefully, stilling the air with lingering, sweet solemnity.



Barbara stood for a space, stunned and bewildered. Then she wandered back over the grass, and up the walk, and sat down on the porch settee. The flowers fell at her feet unheeded. She folded her hands and sat thinking quietly, quietly. A bird flew to the great magnolia-tree and called to his mate. The answer came. It was the trysting hour, — the soft-flushed hour between day and dusk, when the heart of the world turns loveward and homeward. Down to the high branches of the old tree fluttered the birds, as to a watch-tower, calling, shrilling, piping, whistling, the old question and answer, — “Love?” “Here.” “Love?” “Here,” — the simple, eternal duo of earthly need.



## CHAPTER XII.

IN building his great defensive wall, Antony Trent had made no provision against the arch-enemy, passion. It had not entered into his calculations. It was a devastating force inimical to success, and held by him in such contempt that to have given it a moment's consideration as a possible factor in his life would have been a *banal tour de force* of his imagination. He was so engirt and armored in his blinding ambition that the missiles of tenderer temptations had passed him harmlessly by.

The sudden fell swoop of the archer had taken him by the throat and robbed him of his head. He went from Barbara Gerrish's presence as one rushes from the unforeseen face of his Nemesis.

His whole being throbbed with fever. He tramped away, out of the suburbs, back into the hills and woods of his boyhood. Alone in all the sane crises of his life, he would be alone in this his first madness. For he was mad. All the pent up, stifled passions of his youth and early manhood rushed like vengeful fiends into the breach, and fanned the dizzying flame. Through the dim, silent woods he went, trampling the dry leaves and snapping twigs under foot like a wild animal, thrusting boughs



and branches aside with violent intolerance, his bloodshot eyes seeing nothing but the one woman's face and form which had thus undone him. He loved her.

The knowledge had seized him in an overpowering flash of light when he had seen this strong, noble-browed woman look toward his brother Cyril with eyes of love — Bah! Folly! Only his insane jealousy could have conceived such a fantastic idea. Cyril! Ha, ha! He threw his head back and laughed aloud. Cyril, the dream-man, the cloud-gazer, the — He paused, and looked fiercely around. Who had said the word? Not he — surely not he. Yet some one had said it — he could have sworn it. His fist doubled as he stood still, scarcely breathing. But in the hushed evening only the lisping, running rivulet spoke, the lisping, happy river, murmuring like a refrain, —

“Will to know make you happy, Tony?”

“No, it will make me great.”

“And *then* will you be happy, Tony?”

Happy? happy? happy? — God! what did the word mean? Was he happy now? He would escape the sound, escape the hold of the past with its clinging arms and eyes, — and he plunged deeper into the thicket; but the lisping, childish voice followed him, hung in the air in unconscious mocking, leaned closer, would not be still.

“What are you going to be when you are a man, Tony?”

“Rich.”



"And what are you going to do to get rich?"

"Work."

"But lots of fellows work and don't get rich."

"I will."

"Why?"

"Because I will."

"And will you be happy when you are rich, Tony?"

"Yes."

He raised both hands to his head, pushing back his hat as though its weight oppressed him. Great heavens, what had he done!

He, Antony Trent, had sold his manhood's crown for a song. His laggard senses came straggling back with shame-bowed heads. In that moment he counted the cost of his wild leap. It was natural for Antony Trent to count the cost of any enterprise, but up to the present instance his counting had always been done before, not after, the venture. Helen Greathouse and Barbara Gerrish in the balance: down, down went the former, and all she represented, like a nugget against a feather. He stood icy, in gray despair. Slowly he stepped backward, step by step, down the steep his imagination had reared with such indomitable pride and assurance, until he stood upon the narrow level of fact. And yet — suppose she, Barbara, could not care for him!

He clutched at the straw, and shuddered away from it. Barbara against Helen! The madness of his love again overwhelmed him, and his blood



bounded at thought of her. Suppose she did — could love him. A deep flush rose tenderly, shyly to his gray face, and his whole frame trembled at the unaccustomed dream. He had never been loved so. He had never known love or tenderness of that sort. If she —

He turned and walked slowly back. Night had fallen upon the trees, and the moon hung pale and tranquil in the sky. It was a white, still night, in which every form was repeated in shadow. He walked on and on, immersed in his dreams, until he reached an old, disused wharf between village and town. He leaned upon the rail and looked down upon the gently-flowing, moon-kissed river. It lapped about the rotting piles with sad, incessant beat, and lulled Antony strangely. All was quiet about him, as though the world slept. It seemed to him that he too had tasted of some poppy-enchantment, and all his energies had succumbed to a delicious lassitude.

A foot-fall on the bridge roused him, but the pedestrian passed on, and again his spirit drifted. The foot-fall returned, drew near, stood still.

"The river is dark, friend," said a deep, grave voice.

At its sound he straightened his figure and turned slowly round. The moon shone ghostly on his face.

"You, Antony?"

"As you see, Cy."

"I thought it was some one in extremity."

"It is only I." He turned again and leaned upon



the rail. Cyril came and stood beside him. The brothers looked down into the whispering stream. It lapped against the rotting piles, the only sound in the wide expanse of night. Suddenly Cyril put his hand upon his brother's shoulder.

"We are two lonely men, Antony," he said. He spoke as though musing over a grave discovery.

For many seconds he received no response. His words had chimed in harmoniously with the other's thoughts. His voice and presence held a new quality, — a tender, benignant quality which Antony had never before perceived. Yet now, though his wistful soul, in its unfamiliar suppliancy, longed for converse, sympathy, warmth, it had grown rusty like a key in lock and could not at once respond.

Finally he spoke as with a wrench. "Cyril," he said in hoarse abruptness, "I love a woman."

"Ah." The hand upon his shoulder pressed a little more heavily.

"A fruit of late growth is generally abnormal."

"Yes."

"It has ruined me."

"I don't understand."

"It has come between me and the consummation of my ambition," he rushed on in white, restrained passion. "Without it, I would have achieved wealth, great wealth; I would have won adulation, power, ease, travel, — everything that makes life worth living before the long sleep. I have flung it all away — like any weak idiot." His hands clutched at the rail, the words came now in a tor-



rent. "Money makes money. Not to have it now — when but for this — To have to go on in the same old lines, the same old slow grind — It is maddening, maddening!"

"I do not understand you, Antony."

"No. And yet, without her — if she were to say the 'no' that would rob me of hope of her — Cyril, this is weakness, but it is stronger than death upon me, and — I must pay the price."

"Love is no weakness."

"Yes."

"It is the one impregnable bulwark."

"I do not know."

"It is compensation for everything."

"For a day, for a year."

"For life."

The lapping water embraced the rotting piles with ceaseless fervor. Silence again fell between them until Cyril spoke.

"Is that all, Tony?"

"Yes."

"That you love a woman?"

"And have told her so."

"And her answer?"

"She has given none."

"You are not — afraid, Antony?"

"Yes."

"I think you could make any woman love you."

"Not the woman I love."

"Ah."

"She is — not like that." The words came cum-



bersomely. "She admires — loves intellect — heroism — unselfishness. She has ideals. I have been traveling under a cloud."

"Perhaps, — like the sun on a winter's day ; but you have been traveling."

"I am a machine, — a money-making machine."

"You are an honorable man."

The words rang out with blunt force, as a hammer hits the nail on the head ; and for a moment Antony thrilled under them.

"That is nothing," he said dully.

"It is everything."

"Not for love. Great God, Cy, what a fool I am to think of it !" He brought his clenched fist down on the shivering rail. There was another pause, and then with peculiar inconsistency Antony clutched Cyril's shoulder. "And yet, young-un," he said harshly, "if there were anything worthy her approbation in my life — "

"There is, Tony."

"No."

"God knows there is, Tony."

"God knows — perhaps."

"And I."

"Not I."

Through the moonlight Cyril's face shone ghastly. "I will tell her," he said.

"Bah ! Do you want to spoil everything for me? "

"It would spoil nothing for you with her."

"Her? Who? "



“Barbara. Who else?”

Antony started. His arm slipped about his brother's neck. “Poor Cy,” he murmured in new mood.

“Silence,” commanded the younger, thrusting him from him with gruff passion, his eyes flashing in the white face. “I am going to tell her — now,” he went on harshly. “You can't stop me. I will have it over and done with.”

“Fool!”

“You have called me that before; but, fool or no fool, I know what is best for you now. Take your hand from my shoulder, Antony.”

But Antony's hand moved up till he clutched his brother's throat. “If I thought you would dare breathe a word of that — hell,” he muttered hoarsely, “I would choke you silent where you stand.”

“Hands off,” gasped Cyril, loosening the fingers. “I could throw you with a movement, Antony,” he admonished thickly, “but — we won't quarrel. Listen. I must tell this — hell — to Barbara Gerish — for your benefit. If you know her at all, you know it will reflect nothing but honor upon you.”

“You are my brother.”

“You can't help that. Besides, it is necessary that she should know.”

“Why?”

Their stern eyes met.

A vague understanding of some inexplicable mystery came to Antony. He moved irresponsibly



aside, swayed by a power stronger than himself. Cyril stood motionless for a moment, then walked hurriedly away.

Once or twice he stumbled in his blind, instinctive course, but he paid no heed. Just before the house, he drew himself together, took off his hat, and leaned a moment against the stately poplar guarding the entrance. Then he opened the gate.

Through the shadows he saw a white figure moving on the porch.

"Is that you, Barbara?" he asked as he drew near.

The white figure paused. "Yes, Cyril, it is I," she answered, quite still in her surprise at his coming.

He came up the steps, hat in hand. The fact of his being there seemed to establish some right, to prove the closeness of an unspoken claim.

"I am waiting for Robert," she said in her usual pleasant voice as they moved toward the settee. "Will you sit down with me a while? I expect him on the midnight train."

"It cannot be more than nine," he observed hoarsely.

"I know, but it is so beautiful out here."

They sat facing each other, a hand's-breadth apart, the melody of the night about them. Presently the man spoke.

"I have just come from Antony," he said.

"Yes?"

Their voices were quiet, low.

"He has told me of his love for you."



Her eyes looked steadily into his. She made no answer.

"I want to speak to you about my brother," he went on in strained quiet. "There is no one else to speak for him. I want you to know who and what he is."

"I know what your brother is," she answered gently. "I know him to be everything that is honorable and clever in man or gentleman."

"He is all that and more," returned Cyril, with sudden abandon. "He is honorable as few men are honorable, he is absolutely without reproach, he is loyal and true as steel."

"That is nothing, Cyril," she answered gravely.

"Nothing!"

"I mean all these fine, noble qualities cannot make me want to marry him — cannot make me love him."

"You are a strange woman, Barbara."

"Oh, no, I'm not. Every woman is the same. Love is not made, does not come to order. It is very often a misfit."

"You are frivolous. Listen. Barbara, if I were to tell you that Antony Trent had done a great, self-abnegatory action, would that make you love him the sooner?"

"I should not believe it — of Antony Trent."

"You shall believe it! I will make you believe it!" He had risen and moved a step away from her. "What do you know of this strong, silent man?" he proceeded hotly. "What do you know of his struggles and hopes, his obstacles and triumphs, of



the fiendish hours he has met alone, face to face, and conquered? What do you know of Antony Trent? What do you know of anybody?"

She looked up at him in speechless unrecognition.

"I want to tell you a story," he resumed with forced calm. "Will you listen?"

"Oh, — wait."

He leaned in alarm toward her. "What is it?" he murmured quickly.

"Nothing," she said with a little shivering laugh. "Only, one of those queer shudders went over me. They say, when it happens, that some one is walking over your grave."

"You are cold, child. Let me get something to put around you."

"No. Go on. You were going to tell me a story."

He turned and looked uncertainly about him. "I will sit here," he said, seating himself on a wicker chair in the full light of the moon. From her shadowy corner she watched the transfiguring veil fall upon his bowed head and silent figure as he sat, hatless, his strong white hands clenched upon his knees. He drew a deep, hard breath before he spoke, though the words came quietly enough.

"It is about Antony," he began, "about Antony and myself. It is a long story. Are you listening, Barbara?"

"I am listening, Cyril."

"We were two brothers, bred in poverty and high-thinking. I was very happy in those days, but



Antony was not. It used to trouble me that Antony was unhappy. It was the poverty. He wanted things, — advantages, comforts, knowledge, travel. I did not want anything. I was quite stupid, but very happy. Our father — did you ever hear of our father? — he was a strange, unpractical man, I believe, but I did not think so. Antony did. He used to talk sometimes for hours to Antony. It seemed to me then that he was always trying to convince him of the truth of something; but when he had finished Antony used to laugh or go off without a word. They did not understand each other. It was quite different with father and me. We often sat together on the step and said no word, until, of a sudden, we would both look up and smile at each other.”

He seemed to lose the thread of his thought, and Barbara sat moveless.

“Well,” he continued after a moment, “my father died and left us in poverty. Antony was seventeen. He had been assisting father in the printing-office, but on the day of his burial he went out and got the promise of a position from Adam Greathouse. The position came a few days later. That was the beginning of his life-work. He toiled like a dog, from morning till evening, went to bed, got up, went to work. He never spoke of it. He just went on, earning a pittance and giving me half. And I — I took it. I never questioned; I thought it only right and natural that Antony should work for me.”

“You were only a child,” protested Barbara.



"I was eleven at first. At sixteen I was still going to school, still taking from Antony, with no thought, no care for the future. I had my dream — until Antony spoke. Then everything was changed for me."

"What was your dream, Cyril?"

"It is foolish to speak of it now. I thought — I might some day be — a poet."

"You could have been," she cried despairingly. "What prevented you?"

"Antony showed me the folly of it. I could not afford to wait."

"It was cruel — short-sighted."

"Oh, no, it was right. Probably it — the poetry — would not have amounted to much. Antony is not short-sighted. He understood. Nor was he cruel. He knew what would be kindest — in the long run. He did not force me into harness. He offered to help me toward college. He who had longed for education and culture all his life, and had never found it, with his small salary of which he was saving every dime which necessity did not demand — he sent me to college. And he himself went on drudging. He had no vices, no pleasures. He could not afford them. He has his reward to-day, of course. It was inevitable. Adam Greathouse considers him a genius. He has made him his secretary and representative — that means a great deal in the financial world.

"And I continued to go to college. I held my own, but a week before graduation had not settled upon any decisive plan until Bradbury Marvin, one



of my classmates, asked me to take a position in his father's business house. I accepted at once. I knew Antony would approve, would consider it a strong, sensible move. Besides, I had a great ambition in those days. I have never spoken of it to any one."

"Tell it to me, Cyril," she begged gently.

"Oh, you," he laughed unsteadily. "Why should I tell it to you? Would you not smile to hear that I, Cyril Trent, half dependent on my brother's bounty, dreamed of some day founding a home, a school-home for poor, ambitious boys; of finding, perhaps, a hungry genius in the toils and mud and grime and ache of fortune, and lifting him into light and air; of adding my quota toward making somebody happy, happy! Oh, if the rich only knew, if the rich only knew! Well, I accepted the offer eagerly; and thus it was that I, the country lad, came into the strange city.

"I said to myself, I will live simply, as I have always lived. I will work heart and soul for Bradbury — some day I shall have acquired something. I lived simply. It was no hardship; I knew no different. It was healthy. I did not know how to spend money; I had never had any to spend. I had lived far from the bustle of the day in my lonely, country boyhood and in my student-life. Books, dreams, aspirations, — these were the sum-total of my mentality. I knew there was misery, but of vice I knew little and thought less. To see behind every beautiful face the skull, — or the devil, — at the heart of every rose the worm — I could not dwell upon



such thoughts. Oh the old purity of thought, the old purity of hope!" He raised his face in pale rhapsody, as though looking at some lost, beautiful, dead thing. He continued with dry, fevered lips:

"I started out to live up to the best in me, but at the first corner I met a woman who awoke the sleeping devil in me, — and I was lost." His voice died into husky indistinctness. Barbara sat moveless.

"Turn your eyes away, Barbara — I cannot bear to have them on me. I cannot speak while you look at me so. Will you not look away? How obstinate you are! Well, you won't look long.

"This woman — I met her one night. I was visiting a former classmate; he was laid up in his bed at his hotel and had sent for me to sit with him. I had just come out of his room when, in the corridor, I saw a girl — a slight thing — lean against a column as if in great pain. I went up to her, asked if I could assist her. She looked at me as though surprised, and then asked me to help her to her room. I did so gladly. She was pretty; her eyes — There was something of sad in her face; but when she smiled — I could not brush her smile from my memory. It drew me, drew me, and I knew nothing else. I came the next day and the next. I spoke to her, as I spoke to every one who showed interest; sometimes she would look at me in wonder, as though I were a curious thing, something she did not understand. But she always begged me to go on, — and I went on. I was sorry for her: she was alone in the world, lonely and lovely. She



became everything to me. She blotted out my heaven — she was my heaven. She drew me, drew me. Nothing was but her. I loved her — as madmen love. She laughed at me — mocked — repelled — and in repelling drew me closer. I begged, implored, and finally — she gave in, and — we were married.”

She regarded him bravely, although her face had blanched piteously.

“It was the only way I knew,” he continued dully; “but Antony told me — afterward — that I had been a fool. Most men would have told me the same thing. It was the only way I knew.” He looked past her, at his vanished youth, his buried dream.

“For five weeks I lived in my fool’s paradise,” he went on painfully. “And then — one day — I discovered — I discovered that she was not worthy, had never been worthy — the marriage-tie.” A great storm of color swept to and from his pallid face. “She mocked at my horror, my misery, called me Sir Galahad, sneered at my ‘innocence’ of the world and its ways; she was quite dead to honor. She tossed me a bill, I do not know for what — jewels, I think — for twenty-five hundred dollars. It must be paid that day, she said. And then I learned that I had given her all, that I was bankrupt — ruined. Suit would be commenced, she said, against her that day, against Cyril Trent’s wife. I did not know where to turn; but for Antony’s sake — for his honorable name’s sake — this must not be. I went from her, looking at life through bloodshot eyes.



Bradbury was away, there was no one else, I had no close friend — but Antony — and Antony must not know. Bradbury was away — he was the only other one. If he had known he would have lent it on the instant. And then I said to myself: ‘That is it — I will borrow it from Bradbury, nevertheless.’ I was nominally head of the firm in his absence — I had won their entire confidence — I was the only one empowered to sign the firm’s checks — I do not know how I can go on — I really do not know.” He got up, striding up and down like a caged animal in dire plight. But Barbara sat moveless, she spoke no word.

“I said to myself, this thing must be paid,” he proceeded hoarsely, “and before to-night. It will be a loan — when Bradbury comes home I will explain — he will understand. And so — listen — do you hear? — and so — *I drew a check in the firm’s name for twenty-five hundred dollars.*”

She made a moaning sound at last, bowing her head in her arm as it lay across the back of the settee.

“I went out to the bank and had it cashed,” he dashed on in wild ruthlessness. “I sent the money to her creditors. An hour later he, Bradbury, came unexpectedly into the office. My appearance must have startled him, for he shut and locked the door, and asked me what was the trouble. I told him all — all. Then I lost my friend.”

He buried his face in his trembling hands. Only after many seconds could he go on. “He had loved



me," he rejoined wearily; "he could not understand at first. And then he said that she — the girl — was well-known about town — was — It is all too unspeakable, Barbara, but I have to tell it. After a while he said that I had better send for Antony — he said I must get out of it — Besides, there was the money to be repaid, — the money I had taken without right. He was the guardian of his father's interests — he was firm in his kindness — he said I must send for Antony — or pay the penalty of exposure. I think I was quite dead by that time — quite dead. All that had made life good to me, my eager youth, my beckoning hope, my only friend, — all had gone in the passage of a day. There was nothing left to live for. I stood upon a breath of life with nothing between me and death but my brother Antony. Under Bradbury's importuning, I sent for him.

"He came. Bradbury told him everything. I had nothing to say, nothing to ask, nothing to offer. It was all one to me now, — except the misery for Antony. He listened carefully, sat and thought, asked the address of — her, and went off. Hours afterward he came back with some papers. He did not speak, did not upbraid; he only walked the floor. Toward morning he sat down and subscribed to the terms to which she had agreed for my release. She would agree to a legal separation, without demur, on the receipt of twelve thousand dollars. His, Antony's little fortune was tied up, with the exception of six thousand dollars which were available. By some means of persuasion she had con-



sented to take this, and the remainder in monthly instalments of four hundred dollars. Besides, there was the twenty-five hundred to be repaid. He had just begun to live, to allow himself the little club indulgences and mental expansions he had always craved, and which an assured position secures. He gave it all up — without question — everything — you saw how he was bound, one day, in the office — It is almost paid — another month — He gave all up, — the money which had promised so much to him — which had cost the strength of all his powers to acquire — to save me — his fool brother — the felon — the divorced husband of a light woman.”

The melody of the night fell about them. He had lashed both her and himself into insensibility. The moments flew. He arose stiffly and picked up his hat from the bench.

“ I wanted to die — ” he went on in rasping harshness, as an automaton speaks, because it must, — “ but Antony would not let me. He told me to live. Dying, he said, might re-create the scandal. He bound me to nothing but total, silent acceptance, and a quiet, unambitious existence under his surveillance. He never mocked, never chided, never recalled the past. He had taken it from me, he said, and made it his own. He said dying would not help him. So I went on living — as best I could. I think there must be something lacking in me. Do you know, sometimes I have forgotten all about it ; sometimes I have been happy, but with a happiness that few can know? Can you understand that? Often I have



awakened from a peaceful sleep and thought I was the same boy I had been in the long ago — and then I thought — I might take your hand in mine — but O God, Barbara, Barbara, it cannot be undone! — and so, good-night.”

She did not answer. He stood a moment waiting. Then he turned and went quietly down the steps.

Oh the iron and torture of life! Oh the burden of the past, the irreclaimable, irreparable light and hope! Barbara moaned and shuddered in her heavy misery. Her limbs seemed weighted, she could not raise her head. And then, she began to fret, as a child frets, as though something hurt or annoyed her and could not be removed; but no thought came to ease her, and the fretting turned again to deep, tearless moaning. Finally this, too, ceased, and she sat cold and still.

Something had just died. A meteor had flashed across her skies, and that was all. The old beautiful illusion — where was it? If only she could blot out his words, still believe him the man she had thought him! Only she could not. Yet quick the word “hypocrite” sprang like a blow to her recollection, and she raised her head in quick, superb loyalty and defiance. She flung the word the lie. He had practiced no hypocrisy, pretended to nothing which he had not been. She could see it all, — the siren and the strange, Puritan dreamer with his god’s face and figure; the woman’s vanity; the wonder of the adventuress over the purity of a man in an age when purity and innocence, even in a woman, are symbolic



of ignorance and prudery. There had been a moment of delirium, a moment of weakness — he had not been armored — one unconscious step aside and its consequent second — the devil's scoring of his humanity — the curse of flesh — and then — his own pure self again. Pure? Are only children pure? Do purity of thought and motive count for nothing? He had fallen, yes. But he had not seen the pitfall, — and he had not fallen again. Her heart swelled proudly in her justification of him.

Was love playing the juggler with her? Was it she alone who would judge him so? Nay, surely there were others. Surely the two boys up there in his cabin home, the people of Factory Lane, the policeman on his beat, yes, and even Adam Greathouse and his kind — surely they would endure no reviling of his loved name. Some day she would thank Antony Trent for having saved him for them.

Antony Trent! Antony Trent against his brother Cyril — the fallen angel against the strong, honorable man — She could see the world smile — the world, if it knew. Well, let it smile. The world's estimate as to who was the worthier of the two did not alter the fact that she loved the other. Love, as she had said, is not made to order. That is the glory of it — the divine pity of it — it will love whom it will, it is not a respecter of persons.

She was there to defend and comfort him. That was what love was for — sometimes. Not only for the heyday of strength and joy, but, in the hour of bitterness and despair, to stand shoulder to shoulder,



indomitable, self-sufficing, challenging scorn and sneer and misunderstanding, strong as death, and as unconquerable.

The whistle of the incoming midnight train shrilled eerily through the night. She sat alert, a defiant, proud-faced woman.



## CHAPTER XIII.

THERE was a slight chill in the atmosphere the next morning, and as Barbara stood at the door with Robert, watching the red and yellow leaves rustle down and drift along the ground in the soughing wind, she advised him to put on an overcoat. "Winter is coming," she observed casually, looking at the windy lights in the sky.

"Not for two good months yet," affirmed Robert, pulling his hat more firmly over his eyes, and looking thoughtfully out with her. There was an awkward quietude in his face and bearing which Barbara regarded as the natural embarrassment of a man in the first stages of an uncertain, tacit, moral resolution, desirous of evading remark and detection. "Our fall does not end till December, when we begin to put on overcoats, and, once in a while, take an umbrella out for a drenching. This wind will die out toward evening. What are you going to do with yourself to-day?" The question was put carelessly, with no further purpose than that of showing a kindly interest. He had felt a note of sternness in her first word of greeting the night before; and afterward, in the full light, the proud remoteness in her bearing, in the steeled look of her eyes and still, pale face,



had only increased the impression. He saw that the hours of the night had brought her no nearer her usual inspiring self.

"I have nothing in particular in view for to-day," she answered slowly, as though considering, still looking past him at the gate beyond. "Oh, yes, late this afternoon Helen Greathouse and I are going up to Cyril Trent's."

"Cyril Trent's?"

"He gives a lecture to some of the students every Monday afternoon, you know."

"I have heard of it. Then you have met Cyril Trent?"

She regarded him in surprise; but the next second, the remembrance of his state on a certain bitter day explained his apparent lapse of memory. "Oh, yes," she answered quietly.

"Like him?" There was nothing but simple curiosity in his tone, an evident desire to know her opinion of him; but a dark flood of color swept into her pallid cheek at his question.

"He is a close friend of mine," she returned sharply.

"I only wanted to know," said Robert, in quick apology. "I had forgotten about your acquaintance with him. I am glad if you have found a friend in him or in any one."

"Thank you," she answered with a wintry smile.

He turned more squarely toward her, as though to shut off any stranger ear. "My dear," he said, in swift solicitude, "I have noticed that you are not



yourself. Has anything happened to disturb you during my absence? I don't want to intrude into your privacy — but if I can help you in any way — ”

Her eyebrows went up in quick questioning. “I don't know what you can mean, Robert,” she declared lightly. “It has been a singularly quiet week.”

“Well. All right, then. Don't cherish any bogies if you think I can shoot them for you.” He made a move to go. “By the way,” he hesitated, turning back as though struggling with an embarrassing problem, “why not bring Cyril Trent home with you to dinner to-night? Do you think he would come?”

“I can't say. I can ask him if you wish,” she vouchsafed in icy carelessness.

“Do. Well, so long.”

He went off with a wave of the hand from the gate, and Barbara turned back and shut the door.

Just as she did so, the rushing metallic ring of the telephone sounded, and she went to answer it.

“Is that Gerrish's?”

“Yes. Good-morning, Helen.”

“Oh, Barbara, we were going up to Cyril Trent's this afternoon, were n't we?”

“Well?”

“I can't go. I'm going to the city. You know my cousins, the Russell Wallaces? Well, they have sent for me to go with them to the Charity Ball to-night. Do you mind?”

“Not at all. Have a good time.”



"Thanks. I'll have loads to tell when I get home. I may stay a week. Run down and see papa once in a while, will you?"

"With pleasure."

"Good-bye, you dear motherly old soul."

"Good-bye, chicken."

She hung up the receiver and stood looking thoughtfully before her. She had not provided against the unforeseen, but there was no question of her not going. To disappoint him, to stay away to-day, would be quite outside her reckoning. She had an impression to undo, restitution to make through her simple going. She felt herself quite emotionless and calm. It was a sort of brazen calm, akin to that which accused criminals, guiltless or not, often unconsciously assume. The unspoken accusation of the world embraced her as well as himself. A species of bravado born of the knowledge of the strength of her imagined opponents' arguments, and of the contempt with which she knew her own stand would have been viewed, steeled her to imperviousness.

As the hour of her going to the cabin approached, the bravado developed into feverish recklessness. She chose her gown with a conscious passion of coquetry. As she fastened a red rose in her bosom, she regarded herself with excited pleasure. A hard, reckless little laugh escaped her at sight of her brilliant eyes and wildly flushed cheeks; the knowledge that she was looking well added another spoke of power to her already moving wheel of rebellion.



Coming out of the hall door she saw Mrs. Black moving among the flower-beds with shears and garden basket. A novel desire to be seen, admired, moved her for the moment ; but one look into the woman's simple, kindly face turned the little impulse of vanity into a flood of repellent thought.

She walked on swift-footed, blind to every influence but the fixed one of the night's revelations. "Dear me," she thought, "what a good woman Mrs. Black is. How good all the untempted people of the world are !" A cynical, sneering smile settled about the corners of her mouth. The color blazed mutinously in her face, and she stepped over the dusty road and across the meadow as though pursued by countless opposing forces striving to draw her back from a madness. Suddenly she paused, and laughed in sad tremulousness ; the hard light died from her eyes and mouth as though a peaceful hand had been laid upon her throbbing temples. "How foolish I am !" she thought. Again he seemed to stand upon the high ideal plane where she had placed him before she knew, again only the giant of nobility, the simple Lover of Mankind stood out, chiding her, hushing her. As she stepped into the narrow footpath leading up to the woods, all the bravado and misery fell from her. "Let him who is without sin —" came the dim thought as she walked steadily on toward him.

"Are you going up to Cyril Trent's too, Miss Gerrish?"

She started at the unexpected voice, and looked



up to a school-girl who stood just above her in the path, her books on her arm. She had met her several times at the Lauries', and she smiled gladly at her now.

"Because if you are," continued the girl shyly, "I will walk with you, if you don't mind."

"That will be very pleasant, Anita."

"Why," laughed the young girl surprisedly, continuing on with her, "you said that just like Cyril Trent himself."

"Did I? How is that?"

Thus encouraged, the little garrulous maid talked on of Cyril Trent and his hold on the boys and girls of the town, and Barbara listened with gentle pleasure; and presently they had reached the great oak just before the climbing pathway leading to the bungalow. The windows were open, and the sound of a man's voice reached them indistinctly. Three steps to mount, a pace to make, and they stood directly within the broad, shallow room which served both as lecture-hall and living-room.

It was late, and Barbara took a seat near the door behind the broad back of a lad she recognized as George, his student-*protégé*. For a moment, all around her was a blur, and then the forms of the auditors emerged, — boy and girl students, several women, two or three veterans, Billings the cripple-poet, two professors from the Academy, and a trio of young fellows whom she did not know.

She heard Cyril's voice, but did not look toward him. The Martian mountains, the planet's spots and



satellites, the theories of its changing phases, held no interest for her. She heard words which bore no meaning. The continuous croaking of frogs in the adjacent brook chimed in like a note of passing summer; a distant wagon creaked down the hill and passed into silence; some one shuffled a paper or shifted in his seat; the earnest, musical voice spoke on.

Upon the opposite wall was a pictured face which dimly recalled the speaker—the dreamy countenance of one who, with his flowing blond beard, suggested a Norse god. The gentle eyes seemed to smile into hers, and she looked away with a stir of pain. “His father,” she thought in unquestioning recognition. Quite close to her, facing the other, was the fine, dark head of Antony Trent, cold, strong, austere, seeming to challenge the dreamy effluence of his *vis-à-vis*. There was nothing else upon the walls, only these two heads,—the idealist and the materialist demanding comparison.

For a long time Barbara gazed into Antony Trent’s pictured face. “It is good discipline,” she thought with a hard-drawn breath; and then, with an uncontrollable start of dread, she saw, as she looked toward the doorway, that Antony Trent himself stood there, half-turned to the room, his riding-whip and hat in his hand.

He appeared not to see her. He was gazing without, but there was no abstraction in his gaze; his very shoulders wore an expectant alertness.

A few minutes after her discovery of his presence,



there was a buzz and murmur, a rising and moving, the sound of pleasant greetings, the interchange of comment, a movement toward the door. Barbara had risen also. As the little gathering met and wandered off sociably, Trent stepped within and came toward her. At the same moment she noticed Cyril standing in the doorway in leave-taking with his quondam school-mistress, Miss Tynan, whose dim, near-sighted eyes looked up into his face with old-fashioned pride and approval.

Between two fires, Barbara was on guard in an instant.

"You are alone," said Antony, his teeth showing in a faint, conventional smile between his somewhat pale lips.

"Miss Greathouse could not come ; she has gone to the city."

"Indeed? — I thought she would be with you. Then my presence here may be an intrusion ; but I come as a substitute. Robert, your brother, came into my office to tell me that he had intended driving up here in the surrey and bringing you two — and Cyril — home to dine. But he was detained, and asked me to come in his stead. Will the substitution annoy you?"

"Why should it?" she returned with an odd flutter about the heart. "I see your brother is disengaged now, and —"

She paused forgetfully, her dark eyes looking toward Cyril as he approached with slow diffidence.



"Helen could not come," she explained, her voice ringing unfamiliarly in her own ears. "So I have come alone to drink tea with you."

His face was quite gray and harassed, although his dull eyes attempted to smile. "You are very kind," he said. "I did not hope to see you."

"Why not?" she responded with a trembling little laugh. "Shall we have it now? And then — Robert has sent your brother with the trap — he wants you to come to dine with us."

"Robert — wants — me —" he repeated wearily, passing his hand over his brow. "I don't understand. I thought —"

"There is nothing to understand," she interrupted, controlling a desire to touch him, to take his hand in reassurance, "except that we want you. Is n't that all, Mr. Trent?"

"Exactly."

"Will you come?" persuaded Barbara steadily.

He raised his head. His brow was crimson, his eyes looked in strong misery into hers. "I thank you," he said hoarsely, "but —"

She suddenly stamped her foot. "You must," she commanded. Both men looked with quickened pulses at the young woman with her raised head and imperious face. Then she smiled with unexpected sweetness. "You must come," she added, "because I want you to come. Is n't that enough? And please, won't you make the tea now?"

He turned from her, walking to the door leading into the room beyond.



Barbara seated herself on the camp-stool and folded her gloved hands in her lap.

"Do you like tea?" she asked, glancing up and away from Antony Trent, who leaned against the door-lintel.

"I can't abide the stuff," he answered in harsh brusqueness.

Barbara forgot him a moment later, and Antony stood as if frozen in his coigne of observation. Something was humming in his brain; all the hungry melancholy of his boyhood seemed to claim him again, the sense of wild longing, of being left out, of wanting to get into something — something which others had and which had always been denied him. His lips were pressed together in the old sullen taciturnity. He watched Cyril come in, pass Barbara a cup of the steaming beverage, and offer him, Antony, another. He waved him away shortly, and Cyril, standing in the light of the west window, made a pretense of drinking with her.

The girl made a picture between them on her low camp-stool. She was chatting brightly, swiftly, smiling with easy unconcern in her convention-defying position. Antony Trent never forgot the picture.

"I don't care to hurry you," he said presently, "but the horses must be growing restless."

A few minutes later they were standing outside among the trees in the glow of the declining sun, Antony beside the light surrey, smoothing the nearer horse with his gloved hand, Barbara a few feet from



him looking toward Cyril, who stood talking to the boys, his hand upon George's shoulder, his other arm imprisoned in Hank's embrace.

"Good-bye," called the lads as he went down toward the others.

"Good-bye, boys," he sang cheerily back to them.

"Will you sit in front with me or — with Cyril?" Trent asked sharply as his brother came up.

"I enjoy being just behind the horses," she returned, springing lightly into the front seat without his helping hand.

Cyril stepped into the back.

"All set?" Antony turned with a perfunctory nod to his brother, as he himself mounted beside the girl.

"All set, Antony," replied Cyril, a ghost of a smile playing over his haggard face as he nodded in return.

Antony silently tucked the light robe about her, sat down, and picking up the reins, carefully turned the horses.

Presently they were passing over the narrow curving road which Barbara knew as the "Long cut." The setting sun was in her eyes, and she shaded them with her hand.

"You handle the reins easily," she remarked as they sped on.

"I am used to them," he vouchsafed briefly through dry lips. And then he cleared his throat in an attempt to speak further; but several minutes



elapsed before the words came. They were approaching the brow of the hill when the low-breathed utterance was accomplished.

“You have a question to answer.”

She shrank from him as though he had raised his whip to strike her.

“Impossible, Mr. Trent. I — I am sorry — deeply sorry — but I cannot marry you,” she murmured in intense confusion.

“Quite sure?” The cutting words hung suspended in air as though with the whip.

“I am quite sure.”

He leaned forward, seized the whip, and the quivering thong lashed downward. There was a surprised spring and leap; the infuriated horses dashed on toward the precipitous hill with Antony straining at the lines. The light vehicle swayed dangerously in the headlong flight.

“Sit still,” he shouted, turning a flashing white face toward his companions. “Hold on for your lives!”

The carriage rocked violently. On sped the horses, spurning rock, and rut, and road in their mad flight. Fool! Fool! their mocking hoofs seemed to beat back, and the flying landscape echoed, Fool! He had staked all for this, bartered the goal of a life-time for this — and lost. And now it was to be decided — it was all to be decided now — down there at the turn at the foot of the hill. The Joy of Life! The Joy of Life! He had never known it, — would never know it. It was here — here beside him,



enfolded in the still woman who sat so close. And a sudden mad impulse took him to fling the reins aside, — to fling everything aside, seize her in his arms, clasp her close, live for a moment, — and plunge with her forever into oblivion.

But before the movement could be made, there came a sound of snapping steel, the lines were wrenched from his hands, there was a blinding convulsive shock, and they were whirled like chaff to either side of the road.

Antony Trent picked himself up unhurt. In the distance he heard the flying hoofs thundering over the bridge. Through a cloud of dust he saw Barbara come toward him, the blood dropping from a bruise in her forehead.

“You are hurt?” he said, putting out a hand. It seemed to him they were in another life, and thus, like ghosts, approached each other.

She shook her head; her face was strangely still. “Cyril,” she muttered, her tottering feet going forward.

Antony strode past her.

They came upon him a few yards farther back. He lay outstretched, his eyes closed, his face upturned to the sky; a faint red stream flowed from under his head.

Antony bent over him. “Cyril,” he called; but all was still.

He knelt beside him, laid his hand upon his shoulder. “Cy,” he repeated huskily. “Wake up. It’s I — it’s Antony.”



But there came no response.

He put his lips to his ear. "Young-un," he whispered hoarsely, "Tony's talking to you. Come, lad, it's all right."

The rushing river rippled by, winding to sea. Three rigid figures were silent.

Antony laid his hand upon the calm brow, thrust it into the quiet bosom. He looked up into the face of the woman standing over them.

"He is dead," he said in helpless bewilderment.

"I love him," she returned.

"But he is dead," reiterated the bewildered voice.

"Yes," she repeated strangely, as one might say, 'Finis' — "he is dead. I love him, and he is dead."

And she knew no more, except that she turned to the pitying skies and trees, and said quite simply, "I love him, and he is dead." Thus she announced it to the world. It seemed to her that she was walking through a long gray vista, and that she ever turned to silent, gray figures that stood aside as she passed saying those simple, childish words. It seemed to her that she must go on forever repeating those words. She knew, dimly, that men had come running, that the quiet form had been raised upon stalwart shoulders and borne away, and she was left alone, looking down the long gray vista.

By-and-by she moved on after them up the hill, but when she came to the brow some subjective influence stayed her. She sat down upon a fallen



log and looked out. Far off stretched the glimmering haze of the valley ; below her rushed the turbulent river, a hand's breadth of passion breaking the land ; above her rose the silent majesty of the woods.

While she sat there the great gun announced the sunset. The sound rose and reverberated, and lingered, and died away. In the grave evening peace she arose and went slowly homeward down the hill.

In the little cabin on the height all was still. Man had done all he could before the last rite for that which had represented Cyril Trent, and the dreamer was left to his dreams.

The brother alone sat near ; a taper in a distant corner of the room shed a dim gleam upon the isolating silence of his face. A faint whisper came intermittently from the next room, but it no longer reached his dulled senses. Swayed presently by an indescribable yearning, he arose and approached the statuesque, outstretched figure. Perhaps some answer as to the meaning of it all, the struggle, and the ceaseless hunger, and this, the mysterious sphinx-like end, might come to him from this effigy, the lifeless shell of this man-creature whose feet had been close to the clay, whose thoughts had been close to the stars.

He removed the covering from the face and looked down at its grave, sculptured beauty. A strange awe of it almost overcame him. It seemed to speak up to him of a majesty of peace and joy too deep for a smile, too grand for mortal conception. "It were a



curious paradox of existence," mused the man, "if, after all, Death were the Joy of Life."

"Cast thy bread upon the waters," thought the scoffer, "and it will return — to posterity — after many days!" A mist obscured his vision, and he recovered the luminous features. He took an uncertain step away, then walked out of the door into the night.

He seemed to enter an immensity of space, a silence as of extinct worlds, in which he alone was living, breathing.

He felt too weary to battle with nature. He seated himself upon the rude bench just without the door, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands. He was still guarding his charge. The sullen envy which had possessed him earlier in the day had fallen from him, and now — strange habit of thought! — he felt only a dog-like, human need of caring for his own.

He no longer envied Cyril — what could her love profit the dead? Yet, with all the miserable intuition which never failed him, he knew that he could gain nothing by Cyril's death. He knew her too well. Even now she walked apart, remote from him, a woman of peace, wrapped in the same cloud of majesty which shrouded him who lay at rest. He, Antony, could never reach her — it were pitiable folly to strive. Her shadow lover's arms claimed her — this was her wedding night. Her gentle face seemed to look down upon him as from a great height, and he folded his arms upon his breast in a passion of renunciation.



So this was his life — a failure. What he might have attained he had flung aside, what he wanted he would never possess. “Go, measure your success by this,” the dreamer had said: “Inasmuch as you have loved and have been loved, you have lived — this alone is life.” He had made a fetich of self, and behold the result! The boy? Yes, the boy had loved him; but he was gone now, and who else was there? A groan of defeat escaped him. He set his teeth over his hopelessness, his inadequacy. The immensity of space seemed to widen about him; he put up his hand to wipe the moisture from his brow.

The movement sent a rush of defiance through him. Strong nature rebelled. To be undone by a woman — what puerility! Life’s gravest issues were not sentimental ones. In a flash of memory his hand sought his breast-pocket, and he drew out an envelope. It had been handed him in the early evening, but in the first shock of his loss he had thrust it into his pocket unopened. His hand trembled slightly as, by the light of a match, he read the cramped writing of the enclosure:

MY DEAR ANTONY, — I send Morton to you as my substitute. Command him to the utmost. Your loss is all Riverton’s — a nobler soul never lived. For your sake, my dear boy, as well as for his, I grieve as for one of my own.

ADAM GREATHOUSE.

The match flickered out. The blood tingled and coursed through his veins with reviving fire. He



grasped the paper nervously ; his lips set in a line of grim resolve. The scent of the battle, the sense of a forgotten passion, returned to him. Nature does not lose a child like him so lightly. Here lay his power, here he could grapple and achieve. Thought sped away in boots of seven leagues. The piquant face of Helen Greathouse came before his mind. He looked on the vision steadily, knew, without question, that he could and would be true to her ; accepted her as the solution of his life. His prostrate soul sprang erect.

Thus Antony Trent emerged from his short excursion into the Gardens of Paradise, where after all only they who “ know ” not — Youth and dreamers of dreams — may tarry ; and the man, touched with knowledge and sorrow, came again into the tangible world of Fact, and bowed once more before its ancient sovereign, Mammon, called The Great. The gods, in their love for him, had flung him the Philosopher’s Stone, — a hope.

THE END.







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